

Footwork – Why and How (2hrs. 15 students)

Today we will work through the essential elements of footwork as they apply to SCA fighting, and talk about when and why to apply them. We will also talk about positioning, relative to your opponent, and how that can be used to change your fight. If you can't find any target to hit on your opponent, footwork may be the answer.

FOOTWORK – A Definition

“Footwork” is what you use to control your orientation in the fight with relation to your opponent. This can mean getting in and out of "Range" or it can mean changing your angle relative to your opponent...like side-stepping etc.

With footwork, you can largely control when the fight can actually take place and can affect what angles you can hit on your opponent and what targets are exposed on yourself.

It helps to define some terms that help us focus on what is being achieved by your footwork...

ABOUT "MEASURE" or "RANGE"

Roughly speaking, the term “Measure” is just a fancy (period) way of saying “Range”. It is useful to think in terms of 3 kinds of measure....

"In-Measure"

This, roughly, means being within "striking range". Clearly, with different size people and different length weapons, it is possible for one person to be in "striking range" while the other is not, thus you must consider being "Defensively In-Measure" and "Offensively In-Measure" when ranges are not equal.

[demonstrate being "In Measure"]

"Out-of-Measure"

This means that both fighters are out of "striking range"....so that neither can strike a blow without stepping closer. More specifically, we mean that the fighters are more than a small step out of "striking range".

Really... you can do pretty much whatever you want when "Out-of-Measure"...I recommend resting your arms. You would be wise to turn yourself such that it is easy to adjust into your preferred stance...if your opponent should unexpectedly manage to leap into Measure. (Do you want your sword-side or shield-side nearest your opponent? I like my sword-side facing them so I can make a quick sword block if necessary.)

[demonstrate being "Out of Measure"]

"On-Measure"

While strictly speaking, this is "Out-of-Measure", it deserves its own term...since it is one of the most important ranges during a fight.

This is the range at which you are almost, but not quite, "In-Measure". When at this range, a small step from either fighter will put them "In-Measure" and within striking distance. Often that small step will be part of the sword blow itself.

[demonstrate being "On Measure"]

When "On-Measure", intense mental focus on one's opponent is called for.

Your automatic, unthinking, response to footwork on the part of your opponent should be to adjust your range to keep yourself "On-Measure". No matter what they try, you should always be a small step too far away.

To become fully "Out-of-Measure" should always be a conscious choice...perhaps allowing you to steal a little bit of rest (mental or physical).

To become "In-Measure" (whether by allowing your opponent to close, or by closing range yourself) is again a fully conscious choice.

If you successfully stay "On-Measure", your opponent should be *unable* to strike you (although you may move to the block anyways...just in case they manage to steal all the way into Measure).

"Maintaining-Measure"

Another important term related to "Measure" is the concept of "Maintaining-Measure"

This means responding to your opponent's footwork with your own footwork to maintain a given Measure.

You could be using this to stay "In-Measure", to stay "Out-of-Measure", or ...most commonly to stay "On-Measure".

Whatever footwork they do, you automatically use your own footwork to maintain your current Measure.

This should be your *default* objective with footwork. *Changing* Measure (or allowing it to be changed) should always be a conscious and purposeful action.

[explain "rope drill" or "stick drill" from fencing]

ASPECTS OF STANCE/FOOTWORK

Footwork's relation to Stance

"Stance" is how you arrange your body to best benefit your fighting (considering things like defensive coverage, ease of initiating movement, ease of initiating footwork, etc.).

While footwork's primary purpose is to move you from place to place, *specific footwork choices* are made so as to provide you with the best attributes of your chosen stance (or stances) while in motion... or at least upon arrival at your destination.

[give example of stepping through exposing the leg]

Knees always point the same direction as the toes!

This rule protects your knees from damage and gives you the best transmission of force from the ground up into your sword-hand.

This rule most often gets broken when someone is trying to turn or has odd ideas about their ready stance.

For the second problem, I recommend you adjust your ready stance to ensure proper alignment.

For the problem with turning, you can either allow the grounded foot to pivot, or you can "open the hip" during the initial turn.

[demonstrate the two ways of pivoting]

Knees should remain inside the foot-placement.

This reduces strain and allows "releasing the knee" to immediately result in movement in the direction of that knee. "Over-lunging" is an example of breaking this rule...making the recovery difficult.

[show good and bad knee placement...overlunge...how to "release" the knee to move]

Feet should skim near the ground.

By keeping your feet close to the ground throughout the foot movement, you have the ability to immediately plant that foot back onto the ground achieving motion control, balance, and potential for energy transfer up from the ground for throwing sword blows.

Picking your feet up higher causes you to lose these advantages.

On the downside...when you get in the habit of skimming your feet near the ground you will occasionally find yourself catching your foot or stubbing your toe on small irregularities of ground. Luckily...since your foot was near the ground...this won't result in as big a loss of balance as might be expected. In this case, the cost is worth the gain. You are also at less risk if you step into an unexpected hole.

*[show some stepping where the feet stay near the ground]
[show the problem with "stepping high"]*

If in Trouble, Bend your Knees more.

Remember that unexpected hole in the ground we mentioned? If you suddenly find the ground wasn't where you expected...or really if anything at all has gone wrong with your footwork...the right answer is to *bend your knees more*.

This is true even if it is to the point of falling to the ground. If you fall by bending your knees, it will be an easy fall and you will injure yourself far less than you would have if you had raised up your weight and allowed your knees to lock straight... "that way lies knee pain".

This is, unfortunately, not a natural response and must be trained into your psyche. Frequently, when we are surprised, we "jump"...ie. we further straighten our knees. This puts your knees at risk and leaves you in a position from which it is difficult to move, generate force, or really do anything else useful.

Somehow, we need to reprogram ourselves to *crouch when surprised*.

Back Up into "known" ground.

This may not be an essential consideration in a typical tourney eric, but it is a good practice for anyone who considers themselves a martial artist and can be useful in wars and melees.

"Maintaining-Measure" is going to require you to back up from time to time. Since it will be impractical to look behind yourself in these situations, it is important to use your footwork to circle, so that the space you are backing into is likely to be the space you were looking forward into a few moments ago.

In a serious situation, this should be an ongoing maneuver in case additional assailants join the game.

Space behind you, that you haven't seen in a while, is a danger.

Many Smaller Steps

Generally, it is better to take many fast small steps than fewer big steps.

-Smaller steps register less with your opponent as something they need to respond to.

-Smaller steps keep your center of balance under better control which translates to less risk from mis-stepping or bad ground.

-Smaller steps allow you to more quickly "find your roots" to power a blow from your feet.

-From small steps and stances, you have the option of taking the longest steps if necessary.

-Small steps lead naturally to a faster *personal rhythm*, which carries over into a faster cadence of sword-blows and defensive movements.

"Boxer's Tripod"

This is the idea that you should always have three points of contact with the ground (like a tripod). This means the ball and the heel of one foot and, typically, just the ball of the other foot.

Don't exaggerate this. For the foot that is just using the ball of the foot...the whole foot may be actually *touching* the ground, but the weight is mostly, or all, in the ball of that foot.

The idea of the "boxer's tripod" is to have stability, but also to avoid being too "planted" in one spot. It also encourages the use of the leg that is on the ball of the foot as a spring to power movement and sword blows.

Additionally, being up on the ball of one foot allows you to more fully and easily rotate your body as a unit (opening and closing at the hip),

[demonstrate]

Balls of both feet?

Some very good fighters opine that a fighter should always be slightly on the balls of both feet (as opposed to being equally weighted between ball and heel or being back on their heels). This especially makes sense if you are fighting in *period soft-soled (no heel) shoes* as it provides better traction and avoids bruising your heel.

Once again, the entire bottom of the foot may be in contact with the ground, but the weight is shifted slightly onto the ball of each foot.

[demonstrate...weight slightly forward]

Not for Everyone

My background in modern fencing, and a little Tai Chi (as well as my use of modern footwear), has me frequently balancing on the whole foot and sometimes even the heel. I actually focus my attention on making a solid contact with the whole bottoms of my feet...intentionally settling my weight into each foot as a means of generating more power in sword blows. This works OK for me, but you should at least consider the other methods.

[demonstrate...shallow half-advance or half-retreat...shuffle. settling weight]

Being comfortable

Ultimately, your footwork should be comfortable and natural...requiring no special thought during execution.

Admittedly, while developing new ways of stepping and moving, you will have to give it some thought and even exaggerate the motion as you drill it into muscle memory...but...once you have fully trained a way of moving...it must be comfortable, natural, and automatic.

It is better to step “wrong” with natural balance and confidence than to have awkward, unsure, or mechanical footwork!

Train for better footwork...but don't stress it while competing. If you are having to think about how you are stepping, you need to spend more time practicing it off the field.

Why and When are more important than How

Your footwork serves a *purpose*. Precise form, and what kind of footwork you use, are less important than that your footwork moves you to an advantageous place at an advantageous time.

Yes, the "How" does matter some...it can help you arrive at that spot better balanced with fewer targets exposed...but always....the "Why" and "When" are *most* important.

TYPES OF STEPS:

Now that I've told you that the "How" isn't the most important thing, let's talk about some of that "How"...being sure not to get too stressed out about it.

There are basically **four** types of steps:

Full Step - A Full Step is like a "normal" step. The back foot comes forward, passes the front foot, and becomes the new front foot.

This results in you ending in a stance that is opposite your original stance (foot-wise). Two Full Steps would return you to your original stance.

The Full Step covers the most ground.

You can also take Full Steps backwards.

Since Full Steps are the most natural and cover the most ground, they should certainly be preferred when you are "Out-of-Measure".

They can be risky when "On-Measure" or "In-Measure". You could, however choose to be in your less preferred foot-lead while "On-Measure" then use a Full Step to bring yourself "In-Measure"...arriving with your preferred foot forward.

Full steps can also be appropriate when breaking out of Measure altogether...where speed and natural movement may take precedent over other considerations.

[demonstrate simple Full Steps forward and backwards]

Variant: "The Crescent Step". Used to allow ease of movement and stability when moving while in a "wide" stance. (you might be using a wide stance to give yourself more stability or greater rotational potential)

[demonstrate Full Steps from a wide stance using a "Crescent" motion]

Variant: Sometimes can be done stepping through at an angle (instead of straight forward or back).

[demonstrate ...both forwards and backwards (try not to end with your back to your opponent)]

Circling while On-Measure or Out-of-Measure

Which direction you circle will depend on whether you want your sword side or your shield side to be closest to your opponent. When you are On-Measure, or Out-of-Measure, Full Steps are the most practical for *circling* since they don't alter which leg is closer to your opponent)

[demonstrate circling...shield or sword towards center of circle]

Half Step - Stepping the back foot forward so that it is near the front foot, then stepping forward with the front foot. This covers less ground than the Full Step, but *does not expose the back-leg*.

The Half Step results in your ending in the same stance you began in. You can also use a Half Step to your rear.

The Half Step is a good way to move from On-Measure to being deeply In-Measure...while keeping your stance consistent.

[demonstrate Half Step forward and backwards...show how a Full Step would have exposed the back leg]

Shuffle Step (sometimes called a "gathering step" – also the classic fencing advance or retreat) - Stepping forward with your front foot, then bringing up the rear foot to re-establish your original stance.

This is the most conservative of steps in that it does not upset your balance much and keeps your general stance alignment throughout.

If you pre-weight the front foot a bit, you can relax that knee and just "fall" forward a little to accomplish the first part of the Shuffle Step. If done from On-Measure, this can be a fast, and safe, way to enter In-Measure and can even be combined with throwing a sword blow.

The Shuffle Step can, of course be used in reverse too (stepping back with your back foot first).

[demonstrate shuffle step forwards and backwards]

Pivot Step - Rotating the body around one of your feet, usually resulting in facing the opposite direction.

I especially like the backwards pivot step to turn so I am facing behind me, while removing my center mass from the line of an opponent's advance (like "refuse the right" and "refuse the left" from unit maneuvers in war fighting).

No significant distance is covered by a Pivot Step, but an important change of orientation to one's opponent does take place. It is important to retain good Knee-Toe alignment during a Pivot Step and to sweep the foot that is moving near the ground throughout its path.

Of course, different types of footwork can (and should be) combined together...such as doing a Pivot Step, then a backwards shuffle step to establish a longer range.

"The 5th of the 4 types of steps"....

Spins (2 variants) (flashy...and a great way to get hit in the back of the head too)

Both styles typically require a left-foot lead stance.

Master Korwyn Style-Step behind and crossed with the back foot and then "unwind" into the spin and back-hand sword shot.

Duke Miles Style-Turn the front foot's toe inwards then spin the torso and make the hit. Recover the feet as necessary... might turn back to front with torso, might step forward, might step backwards.

Moving the Center Immediately

This means moving your center (or sometimes your head) immediately when stepping most of the time.

Usually the purpose of a step is to bring your full body into a position from which you can attack or to remove your main targets from threat. Both of these reasons are best served if your center moves immediately...not lagging behind the feet. (there are a few rare tricks, where you sneak the foot into place first...then shift the body as a sudden surprise).

[demonstrate how to move the center immediately. how to use partial-steps to learn to move the center-mass right away. how pre-weighting helps with this]

BACK TO THE "WHY"....

Now that we have worked on how to actually move the feet... let's go back to talking about "why" we are using footwork...what we are trying to accomplish with it.

Footwork to establish "Line"

Footwork while "In-Measure" (and to a lesser degree when transitioning from "On-Measure" to "In-Measure") is all about "Line". Getting closer to your opponent, once you are already in striking range does not change your ability to strike or be struck...but it drastically changes the angles at which that striking can take place.

You have two different things to consider while In-Measure:

- "Is it time to get Out-of-measure?"
- Where should I move to give myself the best lines through which to strike my opponent and to minimize my own exposure?"

[demonstrate]

[Note the minimal angles and ease of defense out at the very outside edge of Measure. This is a defensive plus...but also an offensive minus]

Rather than choosing to Maintain-Measure at the On-Measure distance...you might choose to Maintain-Measure In-Measure...but at the longest possible range. This gives your opponent something to throw shots at, but makes your blocking easy. Just remember that you will need to close distance if you want better offensive opportunities on your opponent.

[While we are talking about subtle distances let's see how throwing a leg shot with the hand low and close in...and the sword parallel to the ground...has as much reach as the more

typical diagonal shot to the leg. It is the bottom of a right-angle triangle. Also notice how you have more reach to the head than you have to the leg.]

COMPASS STEPS

This is a drill that I learned from Duke Sean (and I think he credited it to someone else).

The compass drill consists of:

- Standing in one of your guard positions
- Imagine that you are standing in the middle of a "compass star". Be aware of all the directions (North, North-East, East, etc.)
- Using Shuffle Steps that start with the foot nearest to the direction of desired travel, practice making a **6"** step towards a compass direction
- Repeat this for each compass direction.

I think there are 3 useful step variants when training this:

- 1) Make a half-step in the chosen direction with the foot nearest that direction (leaving the other foot in place but being sure to have your weight and center immediately move with the step)...then retreating the foot that stepped so that you return to your initial stance and location.
- 2) Use a full shuffle step in the desired direction, then reverse it to return to your initial stance and location
- 3) Use a full shuffle step in the desired direction and then consider that new location to be the center of a new compass from which to choose a direction and step from.

That's it. Simple drill.

First it is very important to note that these are only 6" steps.

The "WHY" of this step is to give you a slightly different angle on your opponent's targets, while not alerting them to the change. Too big a step will not achieve these results.

This step could also be taking you from On-Measure to In-Measure...maybe entering at a slightly different angle than anticipated.

[do some Compass Drill?]

The next question is, WHEN to use these steps? Experienced fighters will immediately note that a good opponent will mirror your motion and keep a consistent orientation to you (ie. continuing to face you head on and at the existing Measure). This is usually true if you make your compass step while you are both standing ready "eye-balling" each other.

There are two moments when your compass step is most likely to go undetected:

- 1) Make your compass step *while you are blocking* one of their attacks. If the step is small, they will complete their attack, and you will get to throw your next return shot, before they notice and adjust to your change of angle.
- 2) Slightly less hidden, but also useful, is to compass step *while your shot is in motion*.

In both cases, the opponent is distracted by sword-work...either theirs or yours.

Stepping while throwing can take a familiar shot and have it arrive at a different target zone (like on the opposite side of their blocking sword). It can even add power to your shot.

This all sounds easy, but it takes considerable practice to build the habit of *always* stepping a little as you block and sometimes stepping as you throw.

It is a lot like the "freeze-up" in learning to juggle...your mind knows what to do...but your body will resist. It is not *complicated*, but it is *difficult*. This mental hurdle has to be overcome through practice and perseverance.

[demonstrate teaching someone to juggle. Similar problems...moving too big...freezing up]

I recommend going to at least several fight practices where your "victory condition" is that you always sneak a *small* step whenever you block and whenever you throw a blow.

In the beginning, it doesn't really matter what step you take, or whether it helped your fight in any way. The important thing you are trying to accomplish is teaching your body to not be "stuck in place" and to associate blocking and throwing with stepping.

The most useful compass steps seem to be to the diagonals. Whether you are stepping towards your opponent or away from them at the diagonal largely depends on how much they close distance during their attack.

Sometimes you can use your compass step as a preparatory step for a bigger step. An example of this would be stepping into the middle before side-stepping (ala Octa).

[do some partner drills here?]

Adding Power with Footwork

Footwork can add power to your sword-blows. Duke Davin makes excellent use of this when he uses his "*skating*" footwork to add power to his shots. (could also be thought of as a diagonal compass step)

Another variation of this is what Count Gemini calls "*Frame Weight Transfer*". This is typically accomplished by settling the weight downwards and/or in the direction of the blow (usually forward or sideways).

You could let both knees collapse momentarily to drop your weight down on a sword blow...or you could just release one knee to allow yourself to fall downwards and *towards* the loosened knee...in the direction of your sword-blow.

You can even "pre-weight" the leg that will be collapsed. This last method can be a great way of closing from "On Measure" to "In Measure" while, at the same time, adding power to your sword blow.

Keep in mind that "Frame Weight Transfer" can be quite subtle.

A couple of special footwork techniques

- Jumping up "On" to something (the trailing leg)
- Knee walking (forward, backwards, pivoting) (move from your "center") (Aikido)

Now for a whole different paradigm.....

Here we explore a different way of understanding our positional relationship to our opponent, yielding new offensive and defensive opportunities.

Like “unlocking the feet”, using this approach is “simple”, but not “easy”. Our discussion will alternate between general principles and methods that will make learning to use this information easier.

"Orientation to the Fight"

A number of great fighters favor the approach of "facing the opponent's weapon" or "facing the likely threat".

There are some excellent advantages to this approach. In general you can face their weapon in its primary guard (towards the shoulder of the arm holding their sword)...although you may (optionally) adjust your orientation if they reach off-side. By doing this, you *do* expose your off-side more...but you make blocking their fastest shots (on-side shots) and their wraps much much easier.

This is also a good time to mention that, if you have a “lead foot”, choose it such that it doesn’t put your back to your opponent.

[demonstrate this briefly (more detail later)]

This approach is very much like a modern foil fencer fighting from a "six guard"...so their only common decision is do I block quarte...or do I stay where I am? This decision can be made much faster than choosing *between* blocking quarte or blocking six. (The traditional garde was in the center...necessitating a choice between the quarte or sixte block.)

[demonstrate this]

For sword and shield fighting, you no longer have to worry about whether a shot will turn into a “wrap” and your on-side blocks are easier since they are “right in front of you”. Note how an “A-Frame” sword position can close the slower off-side slot... or a twist of the torso will cover it too.

[demonstrate this]

Keep in mind that, when fighting a lefty, you need to turn to face their LEFT shoulder! I also recommend turning the shield face forward towards them a bit so as to provide a "shadow of safety" for your sword arm. Again, if you have a “lead” foot, choose it such that you don’t put your back to your opponent.

[demonstrate this]

Now this all seems simple enough, and the advantages are clear, but I initially had a difficult time wrapping my brain around the idea as I tried to imagine using it in a real fight.

If I were to face somewhat away from my opponent’s center, wouldn't my opponent just move around in front of me instinctively...re-establishing a "normal" orientation for a fight?

If I am facing their weapon, what does it mean for me to move in and out of measure...and in what direction? What is “forward” or “backwards” for me?

To resolve this confusion, we need to separate out two concepts....**Body orientation vs. the “pell zone”**.

The “pell zone” refers to the area that you would prefer your opponent to be standing in when you throw a sword blow. If you stand in front of your pell and throw some blows, you have put the pell “in the pell zone”. When your opponent engages you, they will step such that you are "in their pell zone".

Usually, when fighters both intentionally stay in range and exchange blows, both fighters are in each other's pell zones.

You can use footwork to try to move out of your opponent's pell zone while keeping them in yours (eg. side-stepping).

A good opponent will quickly re-adjust and put you back in their pell zone or step out of range.

If neither fighter makes a concerted effort to fight this "battle of the pell zone", fighters will naturally adjust themselves so both fighters are in each other's pell zone throughout the engagement.

In any given moment, "the pell zone" is an actual *place* on the ground.

[visually demonstrate being "in the pell zone" and side-stepping to momentarily leave their zone]

This is a separate issue from "body orientation".

Body orientation refers to how you orient your stance relative to your opponent, not what piece of ground you are standing on.

To exaggerate, you *could* stand with your back to your opponent...if you *like* that positioning and it is how you would choose to line up with your pell to throw shots at it...then they are in your pell zone, and most likely you are in their pell zone too.

The direction you are facing does not necessarily have anything to do with where the pell zones are (after all, you are standing on the same piece of actual ground).

With this clearly in mind, I am here recommending that, when well inside range (at maximum range "face the weapon" does not mean much), you face your stance towards your opponent's weapon hand or shoulder. Keep in mind that, even though you are facing away from center, you are still in their pell zone...and once you are used to this positioning...they are still in your pell zone as well.

[demonstrate different body orientation while still "in the pell zone"]

A related item to "the pell zone" is "**line of engagement**".

This is the line along which both fighters normally move towards or away from each other.

Like "the pell zone", this tends to be mutually agreeable to both fighters, offering equal advantage to each. This line stays the same even if the fighters are circling each other because it is relative to their orientation to each other in the given instant.

If you were to draw a straight line between two fighters, in that moment, that line would follow their mutually understood line of engagement. In most cases, if either fighter wanted to get closer to, or further from, their opponent, they would do it along this line of engagement.

[demonstrate]

We will come back to "line of engagement" in a little bit.

Remember how, once we are In-Measure, getting closer increases the "lines" (or angles) at which we can strike or be struck? Facing their weapon helps nullify some of the advantages they gain by being closer to you (mostly by making the wrap inconsequential to your defense), while keeping some of the offensive advantages for yourself.

Just like learning to move while blocking is simple to understand but difficult to implement during a fight, learning to fight with this "face the weapon" orientation can be challenging. It is easy to forget to actually keep doing it once the rattan starts swinging.

When you first work on this technique, I recommend getting On-Measure with your sword-hip already turned towards your opponent (this assumes a right-handed sword and shield fighter fighting another right-handed fighter).

That means that you will enter Measure by using a side Shuffle Step (or a side Half Step), keeping that orientation...so that, when you are closer, you are already facing their weapon.

You reverse this shuffle step to get out of range along the same line of engagement.

When in measure, you end up being in sort of a shallow "square stance" oriented towards their weapon hand/shoulder.

It should be noted that this recommendation is intended to help you keep the desired orientation while you are learning it. In reality, "facing the weapon" doesn't really mean much or make sense when "on measure". The deeper into measure you get, the more it is significant. Also, this "square" stance is not the most ideal... but it will help you get your head around the concept while reaping some of its benefits.

[demonstrate]

It helped me to spend several practices getting into range with this orientation and just "living there" for a while to get used to its differences. You might even take video of your fights to see if you are actually continuing to keep the correct orientation while exchanging blows.

Being in this position offers some interesting features:

Since you are facing the threat of their weapon, blocking blows on that side is very easy. You will find that you really only have to decide if their blow will be high or low. Even wrap shots will not require any significant adjustment (maybe just turn the shoulders a few inches). It is like you have 'pre-blocked' much of that line.

[demonstrate]

Blocking off-side shots and slot shots require more work. I tend to 'A'-frame my sword with my shield, which shuts off most of the slots available. For off-side head shots, I usually block with my sword. For off-side leg shots I usually cross block with my shield and keep my sword ready to block high (right or left) if necessary.

There is usually time for these more complex decisions with off-side shots, since they take longer to come to fruition and tend to telegraph their intent more.

[demonstrate]

You can, alternatively, adjust your body orientation so that you continue to face the threat of their sword-hand...even as it crosses over to reach the off-side. (this could be rotating at the waist, or re-orienting everything to the new position)

[demonstrate]

Offensively, you will find that this orientation allows a whole different set of target opportunities...

Notice how your slot-shots no longer have to reach awkwardly across your body. Off-side shots, coming from your left shoulder now have a powerful 180 degree arc of travel to their target (twice the room for power generation than you would have if you were oriented straight forward).

[demonstrate...show how less awkward]

For on-side shots, notice how your hand no longer has to cross your centerline to finish its strike. You can throw straight into the side of their head and have an even deeper wrap available to you.

[demonstrate]

Another option is that you can keep your hips and legs oriented towards their weapon, but wind your shoulders back until they are facing your opponent straight on. As you throw the on-side blow, you un-coil this spring for power. I think it helps to keep the hand and arm tight and close to the side until late in the blow.

If you initially face your opponent pre-coiled they may not realize that you are doing the "face the weapon" thing. When you relax (or un-coil...throwing a shot)...you are again facing the weapon. If you don't need the power from "coiling", you can create the same illusion of normalcy by facing your shield flat towards them, even though your body is "facing the weapon".

[demonstrate]

[see how this looks like a "straight on" orientation? The difference is in the direction the hips are facing]

I also like this *face the weapon* orientation when I fight from my knees. Here, I especially think that it is important that you start out with your shield turned flat towards them so they see that as establishing your “front” and they can line up against that as they approach the fight. Once blows begin, you can relax that shield back to its natural position.

“Facing the weapon” from your knees means that they simply cannot wrap deep enough to get around you on their sword-side.

[demonstrate how this looks when fighting from the knees]

As mentioned before, you can move in and out of Measure, along the typical "line of engagement", using side Shuffle Steps.

[re-demonstrate this]

You can also move towards YOUR front or back. When you move forward (not towards your opponent, but forward as your body is oriented) you crowd their weapon hand. If you move forward after setting aside a blow, you can end up slightly behind them (just off the back of their sword shoulder). Moving forward exposes the slot between their sword and shield. Be careful, it also exposes this same slot on you.

[demonstrate moving towards their weapon hand]

When you move backwards, you move away from their weapon hand...while keeping the other side of their body in your range for longer than you would if you were moving away from them at the conventional angle.

[demonstrate moving towards their shield side....note that this is your "happy place" where they are under more threat from you then you are from them]

It must be noted that, if you move very far along this "**alternate line of engagement**" it will have the same effect as stepping outside someone's "pell zone". They will adjust their orientation to you and establish a new mutual "**normal line of engagement**".

This will require you to readjust your orientation to again be "facing the weapon" and to again be moving along your "alternate line of engagement".

Often it is best to move no more than a foot along your "alternate line of engagement" thus adjusting your offensive and defensive lines...but not causing your opponent to *normalize* their "line of engagement"

Keep your "alternate line of engagement" a secret from them.

[demonstrate]

Let's pause here to examine how this all looks against **lefties** too...

Once again...face the weapon...rather than trying to keep your shield pushed over into an awkward place.

This offers great defense against their on-side shots (into your off-side)...including the usually devastating lefty wrap shot.

Remember to turn your shield face out a bit to provide protection for your sword-arm... just remember to watch out for their off-side shots. This position will offer you a very deep off-side shot too. See how moving along your "alternate line of engagement" offers you better defense when you step back (and deeper offensive wraps when you step forward).

[demonstrate stance and movement against lefties]

I think it easiest to learn the advantages of a "face the weapon" body orientation in the above mentioned manner...resulting in a shallow "Square Stance" when In-Measure.

Using this stance, it is easiest to maintain the desired orientation and to work on learning the "ins and outs" of that position.

While in action, you can easily check yourself to see that your feet, knees, hips, and shoulders are all square to the threat.

This stance, however, does have some disadvantages. While a square stance is good for moving sideways (in this case side Shuffle Stepping in and out of measure along a normal line of engagement), it is the *worst* stance for moving to your own front and rear (your alternate line of engagement).

Additionally, while having your weapon shoulder and foot towards your opponent gives you great reach...you don't need that reach as much once you are really close and you can end up crowding your own sword arm. This is especially easy to see when facing a kneeling opponent with this orientation (thank you to Sir Rainer for pointing this out to me).

[demonstrate this]

As we discussed earlier, moving subtly towards your own front and rear is where your greatest advantages lie when facing the weapon (along your alternate line of engagement).

A better stance for front and back movement would be a left or right-lead stance.

[demonstrate this independent of orientation... i.e. just normal]

If you have entered deeply into Measure with a side Shuffle Step, already facing the weapon in a square stance, you can achieve a

right or left lead stance (oriented towards their weapon) by stepping forwards or backwards with one of your feet.

In the case of a right-handed fighter fighting another righty, you will want to step forward with your left foot or backwards with your right foot. This choice is made so you are not turning your back towards your opponent.

[demonstrate]

Now you are in a left lead stance...but that stance is oriented towards your opponent's weapon...not towards their "front" or "center".

This makes it very comfortable to step forwards towards their weapon and backwards...away from their weapon...but still be in range with your own weapon. Here, small shuffle steps are best.

[demonstrate]

Notice that, even though you are in a classic left lead stance, your right foot (and therefore sword hand) is still the closest to your opponent.

[demonstrate]

Notice how, when you are very close or against a kneeling opponent, you gain extra room for your sword arm to move.

[demonstrate]

Notice how you can throw all the classic shots associated with a left-lead stance, but the "finish" for the shot is directly in front of you...rather than having to cross your body as it passes through your opponent's head. For you, a "straight punch" goes to the SIDE of your opponent's head, rather than to their face!

[demonstrate]

Again, notice how a small step to your own rear (towards their shield side), puts you in your safest defensive position...farther from their sword...partially protected by *their* shield...but still in range to strike *them*.

[demonstrate]

When we think about applying these principles to a left-handed opponent, we will end up in a right-lead stance facing their weapon.

Remember to offer your sword-arm a "shadow of safety" from your shield.

Notice how easy it is to shut down their deep wrap shots.

Again, stepping towards your own rear puts you in a "safety zone". This also gives you a little better defense against their off-side shot (usually a lefty's second best shot) and offers you an interesting downward chopping off-side shot of your own.

Notice how lunging a little forward with your right foot gives you a deep onside wrap.

[demonstrate]

two-heel-shift

There are other ways to arrive at a left-lead stance facing the weapon.

You can approach your opponent in a more typical right-lead stance (shoulders and hips facing forward...which may be optimal at longer measures).

Once you are close in (where facing the weapon really matters), you can...with your weight slightly on the balls of both feet...simply pivot the heels to your right. This will leave you in a left-lead stance facing their weapon. (This is a technique I've observed Duke Hauvek using).

[demonstrate]

To translate this to fighting against a lefty, you would approach with a left-lead stance (generally seen as safer against lefties anyways) and then shift both heels left so that you are in a right-lead stance facing their weapon (don't worry, your right leg is still far from them and is easy to block).

[demonstrate]

LINES OF ENGAGEMENT DEFINED

Now that we have a physical understanding of these things, we can distill definitions for these two “lines of engagement”.

“Primary (normal) Line of Engagement”: The line in which both fighters can most efficiently enter and leave measure. This is typically found by extending a straight line between the two opponents regardless of how much they circle each other. This line of engagement is usually equally advantageous to both fighters and is constantly re-established as “normal”.

“Alternate Line of Engagement”: This could refer to any line of engagement that is different than the Primary Line of Engagement.

In this case, we are referring specifically to a line of engagement established by one fighter but kept largely unseen by the other fighter (who is likely to continue to use the Primary Line of Engagement as they perceive it).

The Alternate Line of Engagement has its “forward” pointed towards the opponent’s weapon or threat, and its “backwards” pointed away from their weapon (towards their shield side).

Small movement along this Alternate line of Engagement can offer opportunities while not causing the opponent to re-orient themselves.

The Primary Line of Engagement is equally useful to both combatants.

The Alternate Line of Engagement offers lopsided positional advantages and disadvantages...favoring the fighter that is using the Alternate Line.

Remember that you should still be On-Measure, and still step into measure, along the Primary Line of Engagement.

Establish the Alternate Line of Engagement when you are In-Measure and... as much as possible... keep it a secret from your opponent.

IN SUMMARY

Always remember that the purpose of footwork is to allow you to be at the right *place*, at the right *time*, in the right *body arrangement*, with the right *orientation* to your opponent and your desired *lines of engagement*.

How you step only matters in as much as it serves these purposes.

- Move naturally (undistracted by what your feet are doing)
- Utilize the 4 basic kinds of steps to best reduce your defensive targets and provide offensive opportunities.
- Subconsciously regulate your distance in the fight (Maintaining Measure)
- Choose to change measure or choose to allow your opponent to change measure only when it suits you. (you can effectively "deny the fight" whenever you choose to.)
- Understand that all footwork done while In-Measure is about exposing lines of attack on your opponent or reducing your own lines of vulnerability.
- Use small adjusting steps to find advantage (compass drill)
- Understand and use alternate orientations to the fight, and to the customary lines of engagement (face the weapon / alternate line of engagement).

Remember, if you are fighting well, but just don't seem to find any weaknesses in your opponent's defense...try using footwork to change the angles of the fight to your advantage.