

## Zone Theory - Physical Zones on the Fencing Piste

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The fencing strip is divided into several physical zones. Much like "red zone" offense and defense in football, the fencer's location on the strip often influences the tactics most likely to be employed.

What are the common mistakes made by fencers (both offensive and defensive) in the different zones? How can you capitalize on these common mistakes?

Each zone has its own physical and psychological comfort level. Mistakes tend to get larger as a fencer becomes less comfortable. In general, this means that mistakes get larger as the fencer goes from Zone 1 to Zone 3.

**Zone 1: (Enguard line to enguard line)**

Generally the most comfortable zone. Most of the fencing is done here. This is the most familiar area of the strip. Therefore, fewer mistakes are made and the mistakes are small. Because fencers are most comfortable here, it is the hardest zone in which to score touches.

**Zone 2: (Enguard line to 2 meter warning line)**

This seems to be a good defensive zone. It is easy to pull an attacker into here, and a defender can make the attacker commit before reaching Zone 3. Here the attacker wants to accelerate and hit. (They will chase to score the touch.) On defense, this is where a point-in-line or counter-riposte will be initiated. Defenders want to make a stand here so as to not get into Zone 3.

**Zone 3: (2 meter warning to end of strip)**

This is the least comfortable zone. Fencing in this zone is characterized by high tension. The most and biggest mistakes are made here.

**Overall:** Footwork becomes bigger, more complacent. Off balance, loss of focus on bout strategy. Distance collapses. Signs of panic (such as large blade work/parries.) Tendency towards randomness.

**On Offense:** Fencers tend to accelerate and attack out of distance. Large steps. Overcommitting early in the attack. Footwork is made in a more upright and off-balance position. Fencers rush their attack and are overanxious.

**On Defense:** Large bladework and early parries. Will bite at any decent feint. The fencer will counter-attack at inappropriate times (too early) and will counter-attack much more often than in other zones. Lets distance collapse. Off balance.

**Zone Strategy:**

- Recognize the common mistakes in both your game and your opponent's fencing in the different zones.
- In practice, fence in different zones in different situations (offense and defense) to become more comfortable.
- Find which zone your opponent has the most trouble with (by scouting before you fence them or during the first part of your bout) and maneuver them there during the bout.
- Recognize your weaknesses in these zones and keep a cool head. (For instance, recognize that you are getting into Zone 3, and concentrate on making your footwork small.)

- Learn how to imitate common mistakes and use them for 2nd intention set-ups.

You can use the Tactical Wheel to create your own strategies for the different fencing zones. Below is an example of strategy for fencing while in Zone 3.

#### Zone 3 Strategy:

Offense: This is the best time to slow it down.

- Use a slower tempo compound attack with your acceleration coming at the end of your lunge.
- If your opponent tends to counterattack, this is the time to set up a preparation as an invitation (while setting up for a parry-riposte) or to take your attack in and finish strong as your opponent counter-attacks.
- Concentrate on keeping your first step and acceleration under tight control.

Defense: This is a good time to use second intention or counter-offensive tactics.

- Set a point-in-line and attack as your opponent searches for your blade.
- Counter-attack if your opponent's first step is large and they are searching for your blade
- Concentrate on tight blade control with your parries. Don't flinch until the attacker commits
- If your opponent hesitates, take over the initiative and push them back.