

Picking a Good Fencing Blade

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The majority of fencing blades are either sold on assembled weapons or through mail order and Internet orders, so you don't have much of a chance to touch them yourself. If you have the opportunity to purchase some new blades at a fencing tournament, use these tips to help find the best blade for you.

You can't tell from looking at a blade how long it will last, but you can pick out a blade that has the weight, balance, and flex that you prefer.

To help you in choosing a blade that will tend to last longer, follow these easy tips (culled from the minds of several top level armorers at the Fencing Discussion Board:

- Place the blade tip down on the floor, push down with the FLAT of the hand. Does it bend in just one spot or does it bend over a longer distance in a smooth curve? Take the latter.

- Run your hand down the blade. Does the blade smoothly decrease in size? If it doesn't, reject.

- Check for imperfections on the blade. Carbon deposits (black spots), a groove that is not straight (both sideways as well as depth) and deep enough. Reject if there are imperfections. With colored blades be especially observant as the coloring can hide some imperfections.

- Check the weld putting together the tang and the blade.

- Check the threads for the tip if a bare blade. Loose barrels are more often than not caused by poor threads or shoulders. You can fix both, but the threads are more of a bother. The groove should widen slightly at the threads, but that is easy to fix, so it is not a reason to reject.

- If the blade is wired, twist the barrel - it should not move or be loose.

- If the blade is wired, check out the wiring job. The wires should not be brittle and the glue should be in the groove and not gunked up over the blade.

- Once you have the blade, put the "cant" in the blade and the curve that you like. If they break during these operations, the blade is most likely defective and any reputable vendor will replace the blade or give you a refund.

If you don't have the opportunity to pick out your own blades, then it's usually best to either rely on a club member or coach, or to call a trusted fencing equipment supplier and note what kind of characteristics you want the blade to have. (Most put notes like "extra stiff" or "good for flick ripostes" in their orders. A good supplier will be able to pull out the blades that match your fencing style.)

Follow these quick and easy tips and you are likely to pick more long lasting blades.