



How to...

FUN FACT

Olympic fencer Bob Anderson played Darth Vader during the lightsaber duel scenes in *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi*.



Try the sport of fencing

This competitive activity can boost your focus and coordination.

Fencing is an exciting competitive sport that's played between opponents with long thin swords. Local clubs all over the US welcome young players, and you don't need any prior experience to participate. With an adult's help, you can find a club near you by entering your zip code at usafencing.org. Here's how to get started.

Know the styles

There are three kinds of fencing swords. The foil is a light, flexible blade with a small guard that protects your hand. The épée is heavier and has a bigger hand guard. A sabre has a wider blade and a guard that wraps around your hand. The rules of the game differ depending on the sword. In épée fencing, which is like the one-on-one duels you see in movies, you score by touching any part of your opponent's body with the tip of your sword. In foil fencing, you can score only if your sword touches your opponent in the area between their shoulders and waist. Sabre fencing comes from the days when opponents would duel on horseback, so the target areas are the upper body, arms, and head, and you can touch your opponent with the tip or edge of your sabre. Most beginners start with foil fencing.

Suit up

Clubs will loan you a sword and protective gear. You'll wear a mask with a bib to cover your neck, a glove, a fencing jacket, and a "plastron," which is a half-jacket underneath for extra protection. The field of play is the piste, the 46-foot-long strip where the bout takes place. Each fencer has an electronic cord that connects their weapon to a scoring system to detect touches and points.

Get ready to play

In a typical bout, you will try to touch your opponent with your weapon before they touch you with theirs. In the first round, called "round-robin pool play," you fence against everyone in your group. Each bout lasts up to three minutes or until someone scores five touches. Next are elimination rounds, in which you score up to 10 or 15 touches.

Enjoy the thrill

Enthusiasts call fencing "physical chess" because it's a thinking game—you try to anticipate your opponent's moves and find openings to make your next attack. You can improve quickly with practice, and you may feel satisfied when you score, knowing you outsmarted your opponent with clever thinking, skill, and speed.



White is a traditional uniform color.

An Olympic legacy



Fencing is an Olympic sport and has been part of every Summer Games since 1896. It's one of five sports—along with athletics (track and field), gymnastics, cycling, and swimming—that has been included in every modern Olympics.

Women first competed in Olympic fencing at the Paris Games in 1924, in the foil style. Women's épée was added at the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta, and women's sabre debuted in the 2004 Olympics in Athens.

Para fencing, which was previously known as wheelchair fencing and is a sport for athletes with disabilities, was introduced at the first Paralympic Games, in Rome, in 1960.