# Holmgång ruleset - 2026

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## Rules video

Most information found in this rules document can also be found in video format on the @holmgang.competition youtube channel. The video is from 2024 but is largely up to date. The video does not include weapon specifications.

Link:
Holmgång Ruleset 2024

## Format

Holmgång 2026 is a competition in HEMA, taking place over two days. The competition has 7 disciplines.

Day 1:

1. Beginners' Longsword
2. Women's Longsword
3. Open Longsword

day 2:

4. Open Sword & Buckler
5. Open Single Rapier
6. Women's Sabre

7. Open Sabre

The beginner's Longsword is aimed at fencers who have no or little experience competing in Longsword. (There are however no definite limitations regarding previous competition attendance or performance).

The women's disciplines are aimed at all who identify as women.
If you don't identify as either man or woman, feel free to participate in the discipline(s) you feel most comfortable in.

The Open tournaments are open to any and all fencers.

Each discipline will be fought in a pool stage followed by a direct elimination stage.
We aim to have a pool size of 6 fencers.
We aim to advance ALL FENCERS to the direct elimination stage.

In each pool all fencers will fence one match against each opponent within the pool in a round-robin manner.
After all the matches in the pool-stage have been concluded, the fencers will be ranked according to:

1. Number of wins
2. Total points difference (points gained minus points gained by opponent)
3. Points gained
4. Points gained by opponent

The eliminations-stage will consist of a seeded single-elimination bracket, including a bronze-final match.
The gold-final match and the bronze-final match will be best-of-three bouts.

# Gear requirements

Before the first match in each pool-stage the fencers will undergo a mandatory gear check by the referees, in order to make sure all fencers have proper protective gear.
The tournament manager and referees reserve the right to re-check any fencer for the duration of the competition.
If a fencer does not meet the minimal gear requirements they are not allowed to compete.

Here follows the minimal gear requirement:

- Fencing mask, CEN-1 certified, min. 350N rated. Mustn't have concave dents in the mesh.
- Back of head protector.
- Separate throat protector with a hard plate.
- Fencing jacket, min. 350N rated.
- Gloves of proper protective level (depending on discipline).

- Fencing pants, min. 350N rated.
- Athletics cup. (Mandatory for men, optional for others.)
- Hard joint protectors on elbows and knees.
- Shin protectors.
- Shoes.

Additionally:

- No bare skin is allowed.
- The equipment must fit well enough to protect as intended, as well as not be displaced too easily.
- The equipment must not be worn or broken to such a degree that its protective quality is questionable.
- The equipment shall not be made of metal.

## Bring your own weapon

The fencers are responsible for bringing their own weapon. The weapons will be checked as a part of the gear check.
The referees reserve the right to reject any weapon that they do not see fit for safe fencing.

If the fencer's weapon does not pass the weapon check, or don't have access to an allowed weapon, they are free to rent a weapon from the tournament.

Longsword:

- The longsword must be of a feder model.
- The longsword must have a rolled or spatulated tip.
- The longsword must not have side rings on the guard.
- The longsword must not be longer than 136 cm.
- The longsword must have a flex weight of <13,5 kg. (point on scales, pressure applied from pommel)

Rapier:

- The rapier's blade must be no longer than 115 cm.
- The rapier must weigh between 750-1500 grams.
- The rapier must have a well-fastened tip protection.

Arming sword:

- The sword must be of an arming sword model
- The sword must have a rolled or spatulated tip.
- The sword must not have a complex guard.
- The sword must not be longer than 100 cm.

Buckler:

- The buckler must be round with a central boss.
- The buckler must not have a diameter larger than 35 cm.

- The buckler must not have spikes or other outsticking elements.

Sabre:
- The sabre must be recognizable as a sabre.
- The sabre must have a rolled or spatulated tip.
- The sabre must not be longer than 105 cm.

# The Match

Each match two fencers will compete against each other over several exchanges, until a score limit (cap) or time limit (time) is reached, after which the fencer with the most points is declared the winner. If both fencers have the same amount of points at the end of the match the match is a draw.

The match will take place on mats with an area of 8x5 m.

The match will be refereed by a head referee and an assistant referee. Both referees are equipped with flags, one for each fencer.

Before the match starts the fencers shall take their corners. The head referee shall make sure the fencers are ready to fence by calling “Fencer ready?!” to each fencer. After confirmation from both fencers the head referee shall ask the fencers to “Salute!”, after which the first exchange may be started.

Each exchange starts by the head referee calling “Fence!” and ends when a referee calls “Break!”. A referee calls “Break!” as soon as they perceive a scoring action, or an action which warrants a warning. Both the head and assistant referee can call “Break!”.

After “Break!”, both referees signal with their flags which scoring actions they perceived, after which the head referee gives out points and warnings accordingly.
If the referees are not in exact agreement, they must confer. If after conferring, when they raise their flags for the second time, they are still not in agreement, the highest point values (1 or 2) awarded by either referee to each fencer count. The referees shall aim to confer no longer than 5 seconds.

In order to score with a weapon action the hit must be made with the point or edge of the blade (or pommel or boss of the buckler, when applicable). There is no requirement on hardness of hits (and fencers are discouraged from using unnecessary force, dangerous behaviour will result in a warning), but blade-body contact that was clearly only a glancing touch performed with very little to no force or intent, does not count as a scoring action.

All scoring actions from both fencers that were initiated before the initial breaking action was concluded shall score points.

Additionally, all scoring actions that were initiated immediately and without hesitation after the breaking action was concluded, and performed without pause or feint, shall score points.
Any other action initiated after the breaking action was concluded shall not score any points.

Scoring actions:

- Weapon actions:
    - Longsword
        - 2 Points is scored for:
            - Thrust to the torso, head, or neck.
            - Cuts and slices to the head or neck.
        - 1 point is scored for:
            - Thrusts to the arms, or legs.
            - Cuts and slices to the torso, arms, or legs.
            - Pommel strikes to the face or side of the head.
            - One-handed thrusts, cuts, and slices regardless of target.
    - Sabre
        - 2 Points is scored for:
            - Thrust to the torso, head, or neck.
            - Cuts and slices to the head or neck.
        - 1 point is scored for:
            - Thrusts to the arms, or legs.
            - Cuts and slices to the torso, arms, or legs.
    - Sword and buckler
        - 2 Points is scored for:
            - Thrust to the torso, head, or neck.
            - Cuts and slices to the head or neck.
        - 1 point is scored for:
            - Thrusts to the arms, or legs
            - Cuts and slices to the torso, arms, or legs.
            - Buckler strikes with the boss of the buckler to the face or side of the head.
    - Rapier
        - 2 Points is scored for:
            - Thrust to the torso, head, or neck.
        - 1 point is scored for:
            - Thrusts to the arms, or legs
            - Cuts and slices to the head, neck, torso, arms, or legs.
- Other scoring actions
    - Domination (1 points)
      Any situation where one fencer controls the opponent’s body in such a way that the opponent falls to the ground in a controlled manner, or could clearly be thrown to the ground by the fencer.
      OR

Domination (1-2 points)Any situation where one fencer controls the opponent's body in such a way that the fencer could clearly strike the opponent without being parried or struck themselves. 2 points may be awarded if judges deem that the fencer could clearly perform a scoring weapon action worth 2 points, otherwise 1 point will be awarded.

- Disarm (2 points)
  Any situation where one fencer loses their weapon and is out of grappling distance.
- Ring-out (1 point)
  Any situation where one fencer no longer has both feet inside the fencing area.

If scoring weapon actions happens before or simultaneously as a dominance, disarm, or ring-out, ONLY the weapon actions shall be counted.

Illegal actions, resulting in a Warning.

- Striking illegal target (cannot score)
  - Back of head.
  - Spine
  - Back of the knee.
  - Feet, including Achilles tendon.
  - Crotch-area.
  - Palm(s) of the weapon-hand(s).
  - Pommel and buckler strikes to the top of the head.
- Exposing back of head.
- Fencing before "Fence!"
- Fencing after "Break!"
- (Sword and buckler) Striking with the rim of the buckler.
- Any technique applying force to joints against their range of motion
- Punching or kicking the opponent
- Shoving the opponent off the mat
- Unsporting behaviour
- Dangerous behaviour
- Influencing the referees (e.g. self-calling).
- Not being ready to start the match on time.
- (Rapier) Grabbing and holding the weak of the blade.

# End of the match

When at least one fencer reaches 12 points or above the match is over.
If the match time reaches 3 minutes before the cap is reached, the referee calls out "Last Exchange!" indicating that the ongoing exchange (or the upcoming exchange if 3 minutes is reached in the short pause between exchanges) will be the last of the match.
The time starts when "Fence!" is called for the first exchange. The time does not stop in

between exchanges, unless a referee calls for a time-out, which shall be done if the break between exchanges is expected to last for an unusually long time.

After the match the fencer with the most points is declared the winner. If both fencers finish the match with the same number of points the match is declared a draw.
If the match ends in a draw and is in the direct elimination stage, the match goes on to a sudden death scenario where one additional exchange is fought until one fencer has more points than the other.

## Warnings

If a fencer receives a warning, they may be penalized, depending on the number of previous warnings received in the match.

- First warning: No penalty.
- Second warning: 1 Point deduction (score can not go below 0).
- Third warning: 3 points deduction (score can not go below 0).
- Fourth warning: Match loss 0-12.

If the illegal action is grievous, the referees may choose to move directly to a more severe penalty step.

In the case of a warning, the offending party will not score points within the round in which the warning was given.

## Halting the match

The referees or the medic may at any point halt the match, in order to assess if a fencer may or may not continue the match due to injury or risk of injury.
The referees may also halt the match in order to re-check the gear of a fencer if they have reason to believe that it no longer meets the minimal requirements.
A fencer may at any point halt the match in order to withdraw from the match, resulting in a 0-12 Loss.

## Disqualification

At any time a referee may motion to the tournament manager to disqualify a fencer from the competition. The decision to disqualify a fencer is reserved by the tournament manager. The tournament manager is mandated to interview the fencer in question, the referee, and any relevant witness before deciding to disqualify the fencer.

Any decision to disqualify a fencer must be founded in a belief that the continued presence of the fencer is harmful to the competition, fencers, staff, or audience.

If a fencer is disqualified they must leave the premises urgently.

# Appendix

## Motivations

### Additive scoring system

In a target-and-technique weighted scoring system, there are three main ways of applying the points earned in an individual exchange to the match score: Additive scoring, differential scoring, and subtractive scoring.
Additive scoring is the most straight-forward, by simply applying the points earned directly to the score. *E.g if the score is 0-0 and fencer A scores 2 points and fencer B scores 1 point in the same exchange, the score will then be 2-1.*
Differential scoring instead applies the net difference of the points earned in an exchange to the score. *E.g. if the score is 0-0 and fencer A scores 2 points and fencer B scores 1 point in the same exchange, the net difference of 1 point is applied to the score. The score will then be 1-0.*
Subtractive scoring starts the fencer at a set maximum score. Each point earned by the fencer is then subtracted from the opponent's score. This scoring system is sometimes referred to as a “hit point” system. *E.g. if the score i s 10-10 and fencer A scores 2 points and fencer B scores 1 point in the same exchange, the score will then be 9-8.*

These three scoring variations have some similarities. Additive and subtractive might even seem virtually identical, with the only difference being counting up or counting down. However, subtractive scoring systems usually considers a 0-0 result as a double loss, while an additive usually considers a tied result as a draw. Some subtractive scoring systems also base their seeding metrics on how many “hit points” you have left after the match, which incentivises passivity from both fencers, or requires the removal of a maximum time limit for the match in order to make sure someone reaches 0 score.

The most important similarity between an additive and a subtractive scoring system is however that the match score reflects exactly what happened in the match. If the score is X-0 in an additive system, that means that fencer A <u>never got hit</u>.
In a differential scoring system this information is lost. In such a system you cannot tell the difference between a match where a fencer didn’t get hit, and a match where a fencer got hit but managed to double those exchanges in an equal or beneficial way. Both would end up looking like X-0 in the match score.
This difference might be important when calculating secondary seeding metrics.

One drawback of both the additive and subtractive scoring system is that if one fencer is in the lead they receive a beneficial outcome of not only clean hits and net-positive doubles, but also equal-points doubles and sometimes net-negative double, as this still brings their score closer to the score cap. A similar incentive also exists in a differential scoring system (as well as in additive and subtractive scoring systems), where doubles preserves the score difference between the fencers, but brings the match closer to the max time limit.

If the score cap in the additive, or starting score in subtractive, is high enough this difference disappears, as the match will end due to time limit being reached before the score cap.

Holmgång has chosen to use an additive scoring system with a relatively high score cap because:

1. We believe the match score should fully reflect all exchanges in the match.
2. We believe the match score of additive scoring is more valuable as a secondary seeding metric compared to the match score of a differential scoring system due to argument 1.
3. We believe the incentive for a fencer in the lead to double-out until cap is reached is lessened by a relatively high score cap, to the point where it separates itself from differential scoring in only a small minority of matches.
4. We believe that a match where both fencers reach the score cap at the same time should be considered a draw rather than a double loss.
5. We believe that the match should have a time limit.

## Weapon criteria

To ensure safety and fairness

## Advancing all to elimination stage

Those who place the worst still enjoy it.

## Disallowing self-calls.

Self-calling, e.g. notifying the referee that you were in fact hit, or hit on a higher target than they thought, might seem like an idea that would lead to more accurate scoring outcomes. However, some obvious restrictions are necessary. In rulesets that allow self-calling the most common restriction is that the call cannot benefit yourself. You cannot for example say "*I did hit them, actually!*" when the referees think you did not, or say "*I hit them in the head, not the shoulder, so I should get more points"*. Allowing these kinds of self-calls would clearly undermine the referees authority and incentivise false claims in order to gain a better scoring outcome.

But what about self-calls which don't benefit yourself? Let's look at incentives.
If we assume that the objective of both fencers is to win the match and advance in the tournament as far as possible, then why would any of them willingly give up points to their opponent? In a worst case scenario such behavior will make them lose the match, and in a best case scenario worsen secondary seeding metrics. So, the incentives to self-call must come from somewhere else than the match or tournament structure itself. For example wanting to be "a good guy" or "show respect for the other fencer". These are social incentives.
The fencer then has conflicting interests when presented with a self-call situation: Do they self-call and risk losing the match but fulfills their social expectations, or do they omit self-calling and increase their chance of winning but risk social repercussions from their opponent who might expect them to self-call.

If, however, the opportunity to self-call is taken away, the social pressure to go against the objective of winning the match and advancing in the tournament as far as possible also goes away.

But if we disallow self-calls, won't that make the scoring less accurate? There is a risk of referees missing scoring actions that could be self-called, yes. But allowing self-calls also includes the risk of faulty self-calls. In the heat of the bout and up close with an opponent it is difficult to keep track of exactly what part of the weapon or opponent that has hit you, or with what technique, or in what tempo, and if the connection had good enough quality based on edge alignment and intent.
Sometimes hits are also difficult to register, which opens up the possibility of the opponent expecting the fencer to self-call when neither the fencer or the referees noticed a legitimate connecting attack, and the fencer facing the social repercussions of this.

Holmgång has chosen to disallow self-calling because:

1. We believe that the fencer should be given the freedom to pursue the objective of advancing as far as possible in the tournament without conflicting interests or incentives.
2. We want to eliminate the social repercussions for a fencer acting according to this objective.
3. We believe it is the fencer's responsibility to fence in a manner that their attacks and other point rewarding techniques are visible to the referees, and in no way a responsibility of the opponent.