

# The Essential Rapier Course

Transcript for video: Rapier 01.01 Introduction

## Guy Windsor:

**0.00:** Hello and welcome to the complete rapier course. My name is Guy Windsor and I've been practicing with the Rapier for about 25 years now. And before we get into the specifics of how to fight with swords, we should go over how this material is created and how you should use this course. Now, there is an awful lot of material compressed into not a lot of video, okay? And the reason for that is that there's no point me repeating things over and over again, when you have a rewind button on whatever device you're watching this on. Okay, so the idea is to cover everything at least once, cover everything in enough depth but, one of the most important things to consider is you're not supposed to get through this whole course by watching each video once. What you're supposed to do, is you watch the video and you either practice after it or practice along with it depending on how you learn best, and then when you're completely comfortable with the material that we've covered in one video, you move along to the next one, okay? That may mean going over the same class material three times, ten times, for six months it doesn't matter, you go through this at your own pace. There's nothing wrong with looking ahead to see what's coming but, if you think you're going to have difficulty with the material that's coming it probably means you haven't covered the previous material in enough depth.

So, the material is historical martial arts and what this means is that I conduct research into the historical sources that tell us how to fight with swords and based on that research I come up with my opinions as to how this sword fighting should be done, and then I teach that to you. Now the primary source for this course is Ridolfo Capoferro's [00:02] fantastic *Gran Simulacro dell'arte e dell'uso della scherma*, which is "the great representation of the art and use of fencing". Now you can get a free download of the original scanned PDF, where I took photographs of an original copy from 1610 and created a PDF out of it, and that's on your course materials. And there's also a free translation done by the excellent William Wilson and Jherik Swanger, which has all the plates and stuff as well, it's laid out pretty much like Capoferro's book, and you can find that also in the course materials and there are other supporting sources that you might want to have a look at. Now, in 2006 I produced *The Duellist's Companion* which was my interpretation of Capoferro at the time. My interpretation

is pretty much the same now but the way I organize the material is quite different. But you might find it useful and so I've added a PDF of that also to the bonus material for this course. And you should also consider getting Tom Leoni's *The Art and Practice of Fencing*, which is an excellent professional translation of Capoferro, and it also has Tom's interpretation included as step by step instructions for how to do the plays in the plates, okay? However, Capoferro was not alone in teaching rapier fencing at the beginning of the 17th century, there are the two other sources you should be at least aware of are Giganti's glorious *Schola overo Teatro*, so School of Fencing, which is a much simpler than Capoferro, much more straightforward to work through. But it doesn't quite have, now they're going to be people out there on the internet who are going to crucify me for saying this, I don't think it quite has Capoferro's depth or charm okay? what does have Capoferro's depth and some more besides is the glorious, [00:04:00] thorough, wonderful, the unbelievably fabulous, Salvatore Fabris' *Scienza d'Arme*, the science of arms. This is my copy from 1606, this book is 410 years old, 12 years old, and it is a beautiful and complex and very, very thorough exposition of the art of fencing okay? And it has, I just love turning these ancient pages. Oh beautiful and its mine, I might cut the gloating out or I might leave it in, okay? It's just a glorious book, the main reason why I'm not a Fabris fencer rather than a Capoferro fencer, is that the mechanics that you see in Fabris' book are a little odd and they don't suit me very well. They're also rather uncommon, most other rapier sources have a guard position more similar to Capoferro's. And also, and this was critically important back in the day when I first started studying rapier in the 90s, I didn't have access to Fabris. I started with Capoferro so you know we are our roots and that's why we're doing Capoferro on this course. But you should definitely be aware of Giganti and Fabris.

Now as you can see from this, what we call the context cross, there are sources that predate Capoferro such as Marozzo from the 1530s, this image comes from the 1540, second edition of his book. And many sources that postdate Capoferro, for example this picture of Senese, and you can also see Fabris on one side and Giganti on the other. So, as you can see Capoferro does not exist in isolation. There are sources that came before him and from which he may have been influenced and there are sources which [00:06:00] came after him, which he may have influenced. And there are sources which are roughly contemporary with him, which it's very unlikely that there was no influence going on there at all, okay? So, bear in mind that this is not the only way to do Rapier, this is not the only source, it's a particular system from a particular period and so you should be aware of

these other sources. And at some point, in the future you should consider at least having a look at some of them.

Here, we see one of Capoferro's plates. What you see in this plate is not the only action described in the text, there are one or two actions that precede it and there are often one or two actions that can follow it if the opponent who is right now being murdered is a clever person and does the counter or the prevention or the feint or whatever Capoferro prescribes as a better thing to do than the thing that got him killed. So, as we go through the course material I'll be referring to the plates and I'll try to be extremely clear about which bit of the plate that we're doing, is it the thing in the picture, is it the thing that comes before it or is it the thing that comes after it? Capoferro has 40-odd plates which show sword against sword, sword and dagger against sword and dagger, sword and cape against sword and cape, and sword and Rotella shield against sword and Rotella shield. We will deal with the sword and dagger in some depth in the last section of the course and we will deal with the sword and cloak in some depth and we will cover the Rotella shield in not a great deal of depth but will at least pay homage to the master by actually covering all of his material. Having said that we will not go through every single plate because one of the things I want you to be able to do at the [00:08:00] end of this course, is to pick up Capoferro in translation if you don't read Italian and work out for yourself how the plate should be done, how the actions he describes should be performed, okay? And that is well within your grasp if you're willing to do a little bit of thinking and if you are willing to trust my interpretation up to that point, okay? I would not be surprised if at some point, one of the students on these courses emails me with an "actually Guy you say *that* on plate 23, I think it's *this*" and you know what? You might be right.

I live for the moment when my students know more about this system than I do. So, as you're going through this, I am here to help you. If you get stuck and you don't understand something let me know. If you're having difficulty with a particular action, video yourself doing it so I can see what the problem is and I will help as best as I can, you are not alone in this. Before we even think about picking up a sword: safety. What we are doing is dangerous, if you're not careful you'll sprain your knee or you'll hurt your shoulder or you'll break your partner's ribs or if you're really stupid, you might take out somebody's eye, okay? We will be going through everything in a slow and safe manner. My assistant on this course Maaret Sirkkala has been doing rapier for about 16 years now, so we will sometimes be doing things that you should not do and I will flag those up as "don't do this at home", okay? It is vastly more important that you finish every training session healthier than [swordschoolonline.com](http://swordschoolonline.com)

you started it and with healthy training partners than it is that you learn to do some particular cool thing today, okay? [00:10:00] So, safety first safety last and safety always. I have produced a safety briefing PDF, it's attached to this course material and you should absolutely download it, read it, study it, make sure you fully grasp how dangerous this can be before you crack on with any of the actual stabbing people stuff. So, for the first couple of classes, the only equipment you're actually going to need is a mask of some description so, you don't lose an eye and a rapier of some description. Now, ideally your rapier will have a rubber point, I would say that is non-negotiable, it will be reasonably flexible so that when you do hit somebody much of the force is taken up in the bending of the blade. It is about this long on you and it has an appropriate hilt. Now, these are not cheap and I'm well aware that some of you don't actually have rapiers yet, that's fine, any stick of the appropriate length will do but do bear in mind that a stick doesn't bend and is actually probably a better weapon than a blunted, bendy rapier okay, so be especially careful. Safety first, safety last, safety always. So, I'll see you in the next class, cheerio!