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## Bringing lost teachings back to life : a proposed method for interpretation of medieval and renaissance fencing manuals

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## **Bringing Lost Teachings Back to Life – a Proposed Method for Interpretation of Medieval and Renaissance Fencing Manuals**

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### **Abstract**

There exists an ample number of pictorial and textual sources from the Middle Ages and Renaissance whose sole aim was to describe and transfer the contemporary knowledge of personal combat skills. Despite the common claim of not being able to learn martial arts from a book, a framework for working with such sources is proposed to facilitate their optimal interpretation and practical application, and finally to create a curriculum for their further teaching.

Presented method is a simple recurrent procedure which can easily be applied by both scholars and martial arts practitioners to any source or set of sources. In optimal conditions it leads towards reconstruction of the totality of teachings contained in a given source, in the worst case it shows the limits of given teachings and/or their current understanding.

The proposed ADVISE method consists of six phases. In phase 1 (Analysis) one tries to figure out the elementary actions contained in the described and/or depicted techniques. In phase 2 (Division into groups) these techniques and elementary actions are grouped together for more intensive practice and to obtain better insight into their place in “the big picture”, and establishing decision points allows for better tactical understanding. Phase 3 (Verification) consists of vigorous training and attempts to find out the limitations of the interpretation. Phase 4 (Interpolation) allows for finding out if mirroring techniques (left/right, up/down) would work in this system, as well as for internalization of principles underlying the techniques themselves, and phase 5 (Synthesis) tries to gather everything together to see if there are any gaps in the resulting system. Finally, phase 6 (External Input) looks for the missing clues in other sources, periods or even martial arts systems.

The results of various phases are often fed back to the former ones, due to the new insights obtained during more complicated practice, therefore making this whole procedure non-sequential, which allows for greater creativity, enjoyment, and flexibility in tailoring it to one’s individual style of working with the sources.

It is proposed that using this simple procedure one can indeed “learn martial arts from a book”, and bring the recorded teachings back to life, up to the point of creating a valid curriculum for their modern teaching and training.

### **Introduction**

Even though as attested by one medieval master “it is not possible to explain the art of fencing as well with words as one can show it with the hand” [Anonymous 1389], it is not totally impossible to reverse engineer the words and pictures that were put on paper a few centuries ago and reconstruct the art that was once recorded and then lost, forgotten or evolved into a completely different one. During such attempts by many various enthusiasts and practitioners a certain pattern of interpreting the Medieval and Renaissance sources emerged. While it originated for this certain purpose, its application can possibly be extended towards any martial art or even any skill in general.

### **An overview of the sources**

It is beyond the scope of this article to address the technical literature in proper detail, however, it is necessary to understand what kind of instruction is available to the researchers, because it directly influences what can and what cannot be done with it.

By the term technical source one should understand any pictorial or textual source which contains explicit instructions on personal combat. These instructions can take form of a sole picture, picture with a short caption, picture with an extensive caption, mostly text with few pictures, and text only [Żabiński 2002]. Technical sources must also have been created with the aim to help a person remember the teachings that they have received from a master, as a personal mnemonic device for

the author, an advertisement of his personal fighting abilities, a clarification of other master's teachings, or even as a manual for personal study.

There exists also a huge volume of non-technical sources that fulfil a supportive role, like chronicles, diaries, archaeological findings or wound statistics. However they are not the focus of this article, and if a reader wishes to pursue the subject, he is welcome to consult another work [Walczak 2002].

### Technical vs. theoretical advice

Technical sources give both theoretical (tactical) and technical advice on how to execute presented techniques. Technical advice gives the detailed description of steps that are to be undertaken to properly execute a technique, and might look like this:

“Item, another counter to the lodging [of the point]. Thrust him from below to the other side of his hand over his sword, lift the pommel over his left hand, pull there downwards and lodge [your point] in [him].” [Anonymous 1452, translation by the author]

While tactical advice will elaborate on when and how to use a technique or a group of techniques and might look like this:

“Note, whenever you want to lodge [your point] in [him], aim at the face, or the throat, or the left shoulder, or under the armpit, and thus push him.” [Anonymous 1452, translation by the author]

As one might see, the directions are often quite explicit and often leave little doubt as to the general idea of their meaning once the specialized technical vocabulary is understood.

### The flow of information

In general, teaching any sport or martial art requires skilled teaching cadre, and a curriculum. With living traditions both are usually taken for granted – teaching cadre comes from the students of the founder of a school, and the curriculum is the creation of the founder and his successors. Regardless of how fluid the curriculum is, the link between the current teachers, and the founder has never been lost. This is not exactly true of Medieval and Renaissance personal combat skills.

While one might argue that there is a distant link between these arts and modern sport fencing, and that the most basic principles of combat hardly ever change, the weapons and equipment used did change, as did the circumstances of personal combat. The term “lost link”, is meant either literally

(as in the case of mounted combat) or in the sense that the distance in space and time alongside with changes of equipment warrants the claim that no single person at present time specializes in the use of these weapons, and does not know their specific techniques and tactics.

The lack of a living teacher means that any student of the lost arts lacks one of the most (if not THE most) important aspects of learning – feedback from a more experienced practitioner. Instead what one is left with is a set of guidelines written or depicted by men living this reality a few hundred years ago. At the same time present reality is very different, the equipment has fallen into disuse, and it is not possible to reconstruct past conditions of real combat or circumstances of weapon use accurately enough to commence the experiments based upon the physical evidence alone. Under these circumstances one must develop a robust method of self-validation not to get stuck with one's personal impressions, projections or limitations when trying to reconstruct a lost combat skill.

### Suggested approach

There exists a growing body of scientific literature on the methodology of training, and also on the subject of fencing or wrestling in general. However it is important at first to take an approach towards the technical literature without any preconceived notions, and to take it “at face value”. Otherwise one runs into the problem of implanting one's own projections and learned movement patterns on the recorded teachings. The subject was approached from a sport fencing point of view many times in the past, and each of these attempts has arguably failed [Hutton 1892; Castle 1885; Zabłocki 1987, 2001; see also Walczak 2003]. While it allows for a quicker recognition of familiar movements and structures, at the same time it increases the danger of dismissing the unfamiliar ones (like the use of a thumb grip in long sword for example), of distorting them to fit a familiar pattern (like parries with the edge and with the point aimed away from the opponent) or even of falling prey to one's physical limitations, as was for example the case with Anglo dismissing leg and foot positions presented in I.33 as “wholly stylized” [Anglo 2001, p. 45], even though they lie well within human range of motion. Another important point is to withhold judgement about effectiveness until one gets enough proficiency and understanding of the whole picture. At the beginning one should always give the sources benefit of the doubt, and be willing to be surprised.

It is also vital to practise with simulators that are as closely resembling original weapons used for

practice or combat, as possible. Especially important are weight, size and balance, and also the material used. As it will be mentioned later, proper simulator or replica is crucial for proper practice and therefore for proper understanding of the teachings.

## Introduction to ADVISE

There are certain preparations that have to be made before the interpretation can start. Obviously, one has to have access to a selected source, ideally in the form of its critical edition (which as of now are still scarcely lacking), and has to be able to understand the message contained therein. If a translation is being used, it is vital to understand all the problems that come with meanings and subtleties that are being lost in the process, especially if the translation is done without help of an active practitioner. Ideally one should also know the context in which the source was created – for example was it a manual for judicial duel, or for a fencing school combat. Such insight can also be inferred during the interpretation, however to avoid complete reinterpretation when such information is obtained, it is advisable to gather as much information about the context as possible at the very beginning.

The process of interpretation can also bring new insights and understanding about the language itself. Certain words might be used in a hitherto unknown meaning, especially as a description for a certain kind of movement. An example might be the Middle High German word “durch”, translated usually as “through”, but in the context of fencing manuals always having the meaning “to the other side”, not literally “piercing through”. Such insights are not uncommon.

Unfortunately the constraints of the article do not allow the author to present actual practical example of ADVISE application. Interested readers can find examples from an earlier version of the method in another publication [Walczak 2006].

### 1. Analysis

In phase one a single technique at a time is being examined. This phase has two goals. One is to get a rough estimation of how the technique should be executed, and another is to dissect it into the Elementary Actions.

An Elementary Action (EA) is defined as a smallest irreducible purposeful set of body motions characterized by the subject (person who executes it), object (the target), goal (the intention to harm,

kill or subdue), and specific method of execution (trajectory, weapon position), which takes at most one fencing tempo to execute. Examples include: a strike, a defence, a step, a throw.

In this phase one attempts to follow recorded instructions to the letter, and if a picture is provided, to emulate the picture as closely as possible. Attention to detail is crucial. Steps should be made with a proper leg, from the proper side. The blade alignment should match, etc. Exact sequence of Elementary Actions (EAs) is very important, even if at first some movements seem to make no sense, because they can hint as to possible opponent reactions or other things that are implied but not described.

It is vital to understand, that the very first iteration gives only a rough estimate of how a technique should be executed. While some obvious errors in the text or in the picture often become apparent at this stage (like mistaken hands, feet or sides), one has to be careful about judging the effectiveness or questioning feasibility of applying a given technique under pressure with an unwilling opponent. Hardly ever the first interpretation and execution is optimal in terms of timing, economics of movement, speed, strength and tactical circumstances.

It might so happen that there will be multiple possible interpretations of a given technique. If such is the case, one should record the EAs necessary for all possible interpretations, and also if possible grade the interpretations in terms of economics of motion and perceived speed of execution. Even though usually one of the interpretations sticks out as the correct one, it is useful to have a fallback position in case it turns out not to be true.

In subsequent iterations the Analysis phase is vital for verification that a technique was not distorted (usually missing some EAs in the sequence) in training or sparring, as is often the case with complex techniques. No single EA should be missing from the refined interpretation, they should simply be more economical, taking less time to execute.

In the case of tactical advice, one should apply them in the later stages of the interpretation.

The list of EAs that results from this phase is an important list of the elementary blocks upon which the whole fighting system contained in a given source is constructed. Usually the more techniques are presented, the more repetitive the EAs get. Later on, when more details are known about their optimal execution, this list might serve to invent specific preparatory exercises for development and perfection of motor skills involved therein or to check if there already exist non-specific exercises that could serve the same purpose.

## 2. Division into groups

During the analysis stage it often becomes clear that some techniques use the same EAs, targets or starting points. Such techniques can be temporarily grouped together for the purpose of discovering their optimal application. There are many ways that one can create groups of techniques, however the most useful include by the type of an attack and a target, by defensive movement, by starting position or by a Decision Point (DP).

A Decision Point (DP) is a situation in combat that is either presented as a starting point of several techniques or one that frequently appears in the middle of instructions, and where many techniques come from. Every stance at the fighting distance is such a DP, as is for example a moment of binding of two swords, the interception of a dagger hand with a left hand or setting one's point under the armpit of another in armoured combat. Such occurrences should be noted down, and techniques should also be grouped by the DPs present in their descriptions. Usually any given system has a number of major DPs, from which many follow-up techniques spring, and a number of minor DPs with only two or three choices.

DPs are crucial in phase two. When such point is reached, the decision about which follow-up technique should be used depends on a few variables. Such variables sometimes are explicitly mentioned in the text (opponent is strong or weak on the sword, i.e. gives strong or weak pressure), but often might not be. In phase two one seeks what kind of variables lend to which techniques.

Each technique has its optimal range of parameters like distance, target area, trajectory, opponent's pressure and commitment, timing, where it works best. When all these are met, the technique will be most successful and is least likely to be countered. When even one of these parameters is off, the likelihood of failure grows significantly. However the nature of comprehensive combat systems is such that where one technique stops being optimal, another one appears, usually partially overlapping with the former. The more comprehensive the system is, the wider range of various parameters is covered by available techniques. Such range of covered parameters will be called Defence/Offence Continuum (DOC), and can be used as a rough estimate of system completeness.

It is vital to note, that to have an effective combat system it is not necessary to have all options covered by multitude of techniques. Very often it is enough to have only most probable ones taken care of. While a gap in DOC is certainly a disadvantage when found out, it does not necessarily invalidate

the teachings as a whole, especially if they were considered secret at the time, and if time for their teaching was limited, as was the case for example with judicial duels.

In phase two tactical advice can be applied. Such advice can help make a decision during a DP, and explain why some options are not covered with techniques. If correct tactics is applied, some situations might be nullified before they even start to arise.

Optimal parameters of execution are notoriously hard to explain in person, let alone in a written form or in a picture. These kind of limitations are understood only by personal practice, and internalization of analysed techniques. Phase two serves precisely as a method of reading between the lines and discovering the implied but not explicitly stated parameters and limits, so that later on this tactical insight can be incorporated into the curriculum.

Usually there will be an overlap and possibility to assign groups to all techniques present in the recorded teachings, and the times where it is not the case are rather scarce. Therefore the first assumption upon encountering such a technique that seemingly does not fit anywhere should be that there has been a mistake in the phase one or in the preparation of the sources, and that a re-examination is necessary. One other difficulty during this stage is that sometimes things get oversimplified, and some important details are left out. Usually recurrent analysis and further process weeds such artefacts out, but one should again pay close attention to the recorded instructions.

At the end of phase two one is left with greater understanding of "the big picture", insight about the limitations and optimal execution of many techniques, along with some useful tactical advice.

## 3. Verification

Phase three is the one where most of the training and most of the judgement about effectiveness happens. It is also the point at which one learns to master the execution of techniques and their application under pressure.

There are three major ways for verification of the interpretation:

1. Testing with replica weapons for possible damage and feasibility.
2. Testing against an unwilling opponent.
3. Looking for the weak points and counter-techniques.

Testing for possible damage involves using sharp replica on some kind of a target to find out

what kind of wounds and injuries can one reasonably expect from executing given techniques. Whether it be cardboard tubes, tatami or any other target, from such experiments and training one learns how much force is necessary, and how exactly the technique should be executed for the best possible result.

Once one is familiar with basic biomechanics of techniques and also their tactical application and limitations, it is necessary to build up the skills required for their optimal application. Towards this end one has to practise both EAs themselves in various combinations, as well as the application of techniques depending on the realistic queues given by an opponent. This process takes time and effort, and requires careful choice of simulators and protection. Details heavily depend on the source that is being analysed and it is impossible to describe it within the constraints of this article. In the end one should be able to use the practised techniques in combat against an unwilling opponent, perhaps even one who has no knowledge of the system being verified, especially if the teachings were considered secret at the time of writing.

During phase three one should also look for counter-techniques. Since the limits within which each technique works best are already known, the job is much easier. It is however vital to realize, that the real point of this stage is to find additional limitations of recorded material, not necessarily to create the repertoire of counter-techniques, especially by introducing new EAs, since obviously every technique has a counter, and none is foolproof.

There are two aspects of countering that need to be discerned. One aspect is that countering relies on personal abilities and skills – perception, speed, economy of motion, and others. The fact that a more apt opponent can counter somebody with lesser aptitude does not necessarily mean that the technique itself is questionable. It is obvious that well-practised motions are executed with more efficiency than unfamiliar ones, especially if they are complex. Only when a technique shows a serious flaw, like using two fencing tempos without creating a danger or relying on the opponent standing relatively still during the execution, one can start questioning its validity.

It is also worth reminding that when techniques and counters are practised, and the incoming attack or technique is known, the reaction time of a defender is much quicker, than it would be in an open environment, when the incoming technique is not known. Therefore, it is much easier to counter the anticipated incoming single technique, than it would be in actual combat, where among others timing and element of surprise kick in.

When a technique is found to be defective, it does not necessarily need to be deemed useless. There are multiple questions that spring from this realization, and one should not be hasty to jump to the conclusion that the original author did not know any better. Good questions that might bring more insight into the context of analysed source are: are there any circumstances that this technique would work under (like inexperienced, intoxicated or overeager opponent)? Would this technique work in a friendly combat or when one does not want to kill or maim his opponent? Are there any social context of combat that one is missing? Some techniques also lend themselves more to certain physical built or advantage. Some cannot be properly executed with certain simulators or require certain commitment on the part of the opponent which might not be possible to simulate in today's environment (like some panic reactions).

These questions might lead to greater insight into the nature of presented material and once a new discovery is made, one often needs to go back to phase one to review the whole material in the light of newly obtained understanding.

At the end of verification phase one gains even more understanding of limits of the presented material, of its tactical application, and should also be proficient in execution of EAs and techniques themselves. It is highly probable that during this phase certain rules of confrontation that promote described techniques will emerge, and better simulators and protection will be developed.

#### 4. Interpolation

There are two ways of looking at recorded technical advice. One is what has been done all along – as a recipe for action or counteraction. Another is an illustration and manifestations of Underlying Principles. Sometimes such principles will be explicitly described as tactical or general advice, but more often than not they have to be inferred from the techniques themselves. Such process of inquiry is called interpolation (understood as “to insert or introduce element between other elements of parts”), and is about experimentation with interpreted material to discover these principles. It often happens spontaneously during phases two and three, when a number of techniques is grouped together and the Underlying Principle seems to pop out almost by itself.

Underlying Principles (UPs) are specific tactical ideas that encompass many techniques. For example, a UP of “diagonal cut closes the line and allows for immediate counterthrust” is illustrated

by a single technique where a diagonal cut from the right (called Zornhau) displaces or blocks a similar diagonal or vertical cut from an opponent, and if the pressure and blade alignment is correct, is followed by an immediate thrust. There is nothing that prevents one from applying the same principle to intercept cuts from the right or from below on either side.

Changing geometry of EAs – switching sides from right to left, trajectory from rising to falling, target from high to low, and even a type of attack from strike to thrust – is a common way of pursuing the process of interpolation. Mixing EAs from different techniques and chaining techniques themselves can also result in new insights, and is an excellent exercise for general fluidity. Usually for optimal effect it is enough to change only a single aspect of a given technique.

The danger of this phase is that there is theoretically almost infinite number of possible applications and chaining of EAs. The aim is not to discover or even to catalogue them all. The aim is to find if existing EAs can be expanded into UPs. Finding an Underlying Principle can set off a completely new understanding of the material, and also significantly boost the performance in combat, since one no longer relies on the closed sequences of EAs, but is free to creatively apply the UP depending on the situation.

This is not to say, that solely internalizing UPs is enough for optimal performance. On the contrary, EAs need to be drilled to the point of automatic execution. But drilling alone without understanding UPs and their tactical significance will create the closed patterns that can be exploited by opponents. Understanding UPs widens the technical repertoire, makes one less predictable and allows for more efficient improvisation if needed. Table 1. shows main differences between techniques and UPs.

**Table 1. Major differences between techniques and Underlying Principles.**

Technique	Underlying Principle
Single application	Multiple applications
Closed set of Elementary Actions	Open and flexible set of Elementary Actions
Depends on exact opponent	Applicable to many possible queues
Learnt by repetition	Learnt by internalization
Focus on instinctive reaction	Focus on creative application

As can be seen, the interpolation phase is a major stepping stone in both understanding and practical application of analysed material.

## 5. Synthesis

The list of Elementary Actions, Decision Points and Universal Principles is an excellent starting point for creating the curriculum. The process of interpretation out of necessity makes one at least minimally proficient in the analysed material, especially if phases three and four have been diligently carried out. Phase five is the place to apply one's full knowledge of training methodology to create a regimen that can be passed to future students.

Synthesis is the phase where everything is put together to create a robust interpretation of recorded material. Once interpolated techniques are added to the repertoire, one can finally ask the questions about validity not only of the techniques themselves, but about the totality of the teachings. Are there any gaps left in the DOC? Which options are not covered? Are there still doubts about some advice or execution of techniques? Sometimes these questions can be put to rest by going back to phase one and reanalysing the material with all the insight gained through the process. Reading the advice again can sometimes make a profound difference in its understanding.

It is not always the case however, and if the questions still remain, one has a choice of either accepting this fact or moving to phase six, and looking for inspiration outside of the analysed material.

Whichever the case, at the end of phase five, one is left with everything that is necessary to create the curriculum from the understood material, or even with the curriculum itself. The technical repertoire is there along with tactical advice and understanding of the limitations of the material. The rules of competition were outlined in phase three along with the necessary equipment. All one has to do is to pass his knowledge and proficiency to the students or record his progress so far.

## 6. External input

If after phase five one is left with no questions, he might consider himself lucky, and also praise the author for his excellent presentation. However, more often than not, after completing the previous phases, one is left with gaps that have no answers in the analysed teachings. After obtaining a decent picture of how the said art could have looked like, it is then possible to look for insights in other places.

While valuable advice can be found virtually anywhere, including sources from a different time period and culture, the closer it is to the original source in both space and time, the more one can

trust that it can be applied to his interpretation. We should be very careful about introducing foreign elements and contaminations into our interpretation, especially if they contain the EAs that were not present in the source material.

There are however examples where 18<sup>th</sup> century sources can fill in the blanks present in the 15<sup>th</sup> century ones. If this is the case, one should only pick the part of the data that is necessary for interpretation, and avoid including anything else. Especially if one finds conflicting information, he should be very careful. There are numerous reasons why sources contradict each other, and such an occurrence does not necessarily invalidate the analysed material.

There is also one caveat: hardly ever one will be proficient in the art presented in other sources. Therefore, before reaching conclusions it is always wise to ask another expert about one's understanding of the foreign material.

Also, regardless of one's desire to figure out everything, sometimes the teachings will be recorded in such a manner that their complete understanding will not be possible. Sometimes they might also be incomplete, and there will only be so much insight that can be gained. Regardless, one should perhaps go back to phase one, and repeat the analytical process in the light of lessons learned. One might discover details which were missed before.

### Closing remarks

The method itself is presented as a sequence, and usually is applied this way. However, it is not uncommon for researchers to randomly skip to different phases, or even to apply insight from phase six during phase one. If only one is careful and aware of what he is doing, there is little to prevent him from applying this framework in his own way for more effective, personal and enjoyable style of work. A single requirement is that the first five phases need to be covered in one way or another, before a credible curriculum is created. Otherwise, everything is allowed.

One should also remember that all basic scientific caveats apply. Any interpretation should be treated as a hypothesis, and as such it is always work in progress, and subject to change when new evidence comes to light. However, with each iteration probability of adequate reconstruction gets higher.

### Conclusion

ADVISE is a simple tool that allows one to gain more insight into the recorded teachings than first

meets the eye. The mixture of source analysis and vigorous practical application is a self-correcting mechanism that achieves a goal of both training a potential instructor, and creation of curricula, therefore filling the gap necessary for passing the knowledge to future students. Once these two conditions are met, it is possible to claim the resurrection of lost teachings. Such effort is currently ongoing in numerous fields of Historical European Martial Arts.

Constantly growing and improving state of research and practice of HEMA is the testimony to the fact that one can actually learn martial arts from a book, even if no living expert in the subject is around.

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## Wskrzeszanie utraconych nauk – proponowana metoda interpretacji średniowiecznych i renesansowych traktatów szermierczych

**Słowa kluczowe:** rekonstrukcja, historyczne zakres technik, historyczne europejskie sztuki walki, podręczniki szermierki

### Streszczenie

Artykuł omawia proponowaną metodę rekonstrukcji nauk zawartych w źródłach zwanych potocznie traktatami szermierzymi.

Na wstępie pokrótce scharakteryzowano rodzaje dostępnego materiału źródłowego i określono, co należy rozumieć pod określeniem źródło techniczne i źródło nietechniczne. Następnie wyróżniono dwa podstawowe rodzaje porad w nich zawartych: techniczne oraz taktyczne.

W nauczaniu dowolnej sztuki walki głównym źródłem wiedzy jest osobisty przekaz od nauczyciela do ucznia. Z definicji Dawne Europejskie Sztuki Walki są tego połączenia pozbawione. Wszelkie próby rekonstrukcji należy zatem zaopatrzyć w silny mechanizm autokorekcji, który pozwoli uniknąć błędnych interpretacji oraz ślepych uliczek.

Sugerowane podejście obejmuje dokładne podążanie za wskazówkami danego mistrza i próby wiernego odtworzenia przekazanych nauk, bez prób wtłoczenia ich w ramy, z którymi badacz jest już zaznajomiony. Istotne jest stosowanie rekwizytów (broni, opancerzenia), które jak najwierniej będą oddawać parametry używanych w epoce, kiedy badana sztuka walki była jeszcze w użyciu. Badacz musi posiadać dostęp do źródła i być w stanie odczytać zawarty tam przekaz. Najlepiej też, jak zna kontekst, w jakim opisana sztuka walki była stosowana, aby uniknąć między innymi błędnego oszacowania skuteczności prezentowanych nauk.

Metoda składa się z sześciu faz, od których bierze swoją nazwę (ADVISE – ang. porada). W fazie pierwszej (Analiza) każdą opisaną technikę poddaje się rozbiorowi na Działania Podstawowe (Elementary Action, EA), czyli nieredukowalne najmniejsze celowe grupy poruszeń ciałem charakteryzowane przez podmiot, przedmiot, cel i konkretny sposób wykonania, zajmujące nie więcej niż jedno tempo szermiercze. Podział ten pozwala odkryć podstawowe elementy, z których zbudowany jest cały system i uzyskać ogólne pojęcie na temat zawartych w nim wzorców ruchowych. Później pozwoli na stworzenie listy ćwiczeń przygotowawczych do programu treningowego. W celu optymalizacji odkrytych wzorców ruchowych, w fazie drugiej (Podział na grupy) dokonuje się grupowania technik pod kątem powtarzających się Działań Podstawowych oraz prowadzi poszukiwania Punktów Decyzyjnych (Decision Points, DP), czyli takich momentów w walce, które pozwalają walczącemu na wybranie jednej z wielu technik. Każda technika działa optymalnie w pewnym zakresie parametrów i celem tej fazy jest ich odkrycie. Powiązanie ich w grupy pozwala na znalezienie mocnych i słabych punktów i na wyznaczenie Spektrum Ataku/Obrony (Defence/Offence Continuum, DOC),

całkowitego zakresu parametrów walki obejmowanych przez badany system. Miara ta może posłużyć do określenia jego spójności i kompletności.

Faza trzecia (Weryfikacja) obejmuje intensywny trening poświęcony kompetentnemu opanowaniu wzorców ruchowych a następnie próbom ich intensywnego testowania z przeciwnikami o różnym poziomie kooperacji i znajomości technik. Faza ta też pozwala na odnalezienie słabych punktów zarówno interpretacji, jak i samego wykonania.

Faza czwarta (Interpolacja) polega na poszukiwaniu Podstawowych Zasad (Underlying Principles, UP), których szczególnymi manifestacjami są opisane techniki. Poprzez zmianę strony, z której technika jest wykonywana, albo kierunku jej uderzania można odkryć dodatkowe zastosowania, a dzięki temu uzyskać większą swobodę ich aplikacji w trakcie walki. Faza piąta (Synteza) to moment zebrania wszystkich dotychczas uzyskanych informacji oraz wglądów i szukania odpowiedzi na pytania oraz luki, jakie wciąż jeszcze istnieją. Jest to też moment, w którym można rozpocząć tworzenie kompleksowego programu treningowego dla danego materiału.

Często kolejne etapy wymuszają powrót do którejś z poprzednich faz. Zdarza się też, że na pytania nie ma odpowiedzi w interesującym nas materiale źródłowym. W takim wypadku należy szukać ich na zewnątrz i temu służy faza szósta (Wkład zewnętrzny). Tutaj należy postępować z rozwagą ze względu na możliwą kontaminację materiału ideami w nim nieobecnymi. Metoda ta pozwala na kompleksowe opracowanie dowolnego źródła technicznego. Ryzyko niepoprawnej interpretacji maleje wraz z każdą jej iteracją, a w rezultacie zastosowania jest wykształcenie kadry trenerskiej o wysokim stopniu kompetencji ruchowej i głębokim zrozumieniu taktycznym danej sztuki walki oraz zręby programu treningowego. Te dwa elementy pozwolą przywrócić utracone połączenie nauczyciela z uczniem i wskrzesić zaginione sztuki walki.