

# Stage Combat 101: Tip Sheet

Stage combat is fun to do, it's a great workout, and when done well, looks spectacular onstage. Like songs in a musical, stage combat tells the story when words are not enough. However, when stage combat goes bad, people get hurt. Stage combat must be taught and performed in such a way that keeps you safe. Before you even THINK about throwing a fake punch or picking up a sword, please take the following notes to heart.

## Safety first, safety last, and safety always.

- You must learn stage combat from a **qualified** and **experienced** instructor. The role of the fight director (FD) is to teach stage combat skills and stage violence for shows, and can also often advise about weapons (which ones are era-appropriate, how to acquire/rent them, and how to safely handle and care for weapons), historical accuracy, falls, lifts, and more.
- Stage combat is meant to **look** real – but it is still possible to get hurt.
- You should never be asked to do something that makes you feel **unsafe**.
- **Speak** up if you feel unsure or unsafe about a move or direction – even if it's your director, scene partner, or the FD asking you to do the move.
- Be aware of your physical and emotional limits. If you ever feel unsure or unsafe during stage combat, **stop** what you are doing immediately – even if you are in the middle of a show! (Better to stop, regroup, and start again than to chance someone getting injured.)
- Understand the risks and responsibilities of being an actor-combatant. Stage combat requires a huge amount of trust between scene partners. You have to take care of each other.
- Know your choreography **perfectly** – stage combat is not the time to improvise.
- You must display **maturity** when learning stage combat. There is always the urge to goof around and play-fight, or mess around with prop weapons (because they're usually super-cool!). In stage combat, though, there is no room for messing around, because that's how people get hurt and props get damaged.
- There are **consequences** for messing around during stage combat (namely, being removed from the fight).
- Taking a stage combat class, doing stage combat in a show, or having studied martial arts/fencing **doesn't qualify you** to teach others stage combat.
- Stage combat must never be done outside of the classroom. Practicing fake punches on your siblings or friends, or demonstrating choreography outside of the school can lead to injuries or even get you in trouble – particularly if another teacher, the principal, or a parent is around and doesn't know that your stage combat moves are for class!

