

Oxford Sword & Staff Equipment Guide

This guide is intended to help those new to HEMA, or those deciding on what to get next. If you're new to the club and have no gear at all, don't worry about reading this guide yet - just show up in comfortable clothes and we'll lend you anything you need for your first few sessions.

[The first part](#) is a rough schedule of what to buy in what order, based on increasing intensity of training and fighting. You won't necessarily get everything in this order, but you won't go far wrong if you do. [The second part](#) is a list of suppliers, and recommendations for specific products.

This guide is initially aimed at what's needed for longsword, since there's a longsword session every week and that's where everyone starts. However, there are also recommendations for trainers for the other weapons we study. As for protective gear, if you have enough for longsword, you have enough for everything else we do.

If you have any additional questions on the subject, the best thing to do is either ask at one of our training sessions, or on the Facebook group.

Part 1: What to get...

...for drilling

- [Longsword](#). Some regular members have spares, but it's a good idea to get your own as soon as possible. That way you can avoid disappointment at training, and practise at home!
- [Mask](#). Necessary for almost any paired drill, and sparring of course. So protect your head! There are two standards, CEN 1 and CEN 2. Many tournaments require CEN 2.
- [Gloves](#). As above. Avoid broken fingers.

...for low intensity club sparring

- [Jacket](#). Protects against sharp points in the case of a steel sword breaking (look for a Newton rating of at least 350N), and provides padding to reduce pain and risk of injury from all kinds of hits - particularly thrusts to the chest. Make sure to get one with a blade catcher pocket on the throat.
- [Gorget](#). Protect Ya Neck (Wu Tang Clan, 1992). Masks have bibs and jackets have blade catchers, but don't rely on them - nothing beats a rigid plate in front of your throat.
- [Groin protector](#). Essential for some. Less essential for others.

- [Plastic chest protector](#). A thrust to the solar plexus, even through a jacket, really hurts.
- [Joint protection](#). Elbows and knees. Good idea for low intensity, essential for heavy. Broken knees are no fun. It's important that the knee protection covers the sides as well as the front!
- [Mask overlay/Back of head protection](#). Again, recommended for low intensity, essential for heavy. Fencing masks do not provide enough protection against a full speed steel feder to the back of the head.

...for high intensity club sparring and tournaments

- [Forearm and shin guards](#). When the steel is really flying, hard hits to the forearms or shins can take you out of the fight. Many tournaments require these.
- [Breeches](#). Provides puncture protection in the same way as jackets (at least 350N, as with jackets), and may have padding as well. Also, can be worn with your choice of knee socks in club colours or with cool and witty designs.
- **Plastron**. An undershirt that provides additional puncture protection. Not a big priority for longsword, but worth knowing about. Required by some tournaments.

...for getting involved with other weapons

- [Staff](#). This is a type of long stick. You hit people with it.
- [Dagger](#). Pointy. Stabby. Specifically, we use the medieval rondel dagger.
- [Dussack](#). A short, somewhat curved sword with a closed hilt.
- **Rapier/Sidesword**. A straight, single-handed sword with a complex hilt and *tons of style*.

...for pugilism / boxing pad work

- Each week we warm up with either pugilism or boxing pads. The idea is to get you loosened up and ready to train with a weapon. We strongly recommend you wear [MMA or boxing gloves](#) for these sessions.

Part 2: Recommendations

This section is to help you navigate the large and increasing number of options for HEMA gear. These recommendations are not intended as the be all and end all; they are some good options that have been around for some time, and are tried and tested by the community. This list is therefore not comprehensive - if something isn't on the list, it doesn't mean it's not good! Feel free to ask questions if you want to order off-menu.

There are also some 'starter kit' suggestions. These are cheap, quick to ship items that are sufficient at lower levels, but will eventually need replacing as you progress.

To start with, a list of suppliers, with the country they're based in, and a description of what they sell. Where known, shipping rates to the UK are included. For suppliers with pricey shipping, it's always worth asking if anyone else in the club wants to order at the same time for shared postage.

Suppliers

- [Academy of Historical Arts Shop](#). UK. Our parent organisation! Distributor for a variety of brands (as well as several excellent books). AHA member discount on a wide range of items.
- [The HEMA Shop](#). UK. Distributor for SPES. We get good discounts with them on their own branded gear, Red Dragon. Shipping £8.
- [Tempus Fugitives](#). UK. Distributor for Kvetun, Malleus Martialis, and Bloss. Good for avoiding faff with customs and shipping charges!
- [Black Armoury](#). France. Distributor for several brands, including Regenyei and Destroyer Modz. Small own brand line; generally good stuff. Shipping €20+.
- [Faits d'Armes](#). France. Distributor for several brands, including Regenyei and Black Fencer. Shipping €16.50.
- [SPES](#). Poland. Long standing manufacturer of some of the most reliable gear in HEMA. Shipping €25+.
- [Faceless Fencer](#). UK. Forged in the crucible of our very own club, FF is a maker of quality rubber dussacks.
- [Destroyer Modz](#). USA. Cool, generally well-made protective gear, "by fighters for fighters". Shipping \$75+ (order from Black Armoury!).
- [Leon Paul](#). UK. One of the best sport fencing brands for decades; LP has partnered with SPES to produce a line of HEMA gear. Shipping £10.
- [Allstar](#). UK. Sport fencing brand with good masks.
- [PBT](#). Hungary. Sport fencing brand with a decent HEMA range.
- [Gajardoni](#). Italy. Super stylish protective gear.
- [Sparring Gloves](#). Poland. Manufacturer of Sparring Gloves (duh).
- [Regenyei Armory](#). Hungary. Manufacturer of swords.
- [Ensifer](#). Poland. Also manufacturer of swords.
- [Kvetun Armoury](#). Russia. Manufacturer of more swords (also protectors).
- [Black Fencer](#). Spain. Manufacturer of a wide range of different synthetic weapons, and a growing range of steel swords. Shipping €25+
- [RDX](#). Manufacturer of good quality MMA and Boxing gloves at reasonable prices.

Longsword

Starter: Red Dragon Synthetic Longsword (The HEMA Shop) £35 (with club discount) + shipping

Great for starting with, because it's so cheap. Be aware, though, that the weight and handling characteristics of these are not good analogues for steel, so if you're happy to commit to the hobby it might be best to go straight for a feder.

Recommendation: Longsword Feder (Regenyei Armory) €210 + shipping

Good price, good handling, good safety and good durability. These are the gold standard in HEMA for a reason. Regenyei offers a number of customisation options on his feders, such as hilt and blade length, grip material and colour. You'll see a lot of these around the club, so feel free to ask to try out different configurations and work out what suits you best. The standard model is also available from Faits d'Armes, with a shorter shipping time.

Alternatives:

Ensifer feders - durable, slightly shorter and heavier than Regenyei as standard, which gives good presence in the bind.

Kvetun Armoury feders - none in the club at present, but very well reviewed online.

Black Fencer synthetics - handles much more like steel than Red Dragon, but still cheaper. (There are many more manufacturers of feders, so feel free to ask about others. To save you time - Kingston Arms and Hanwei feders are not safe to fence with.)

Mask

Starter: Red Dragon HEMA Fencing Mask CEN 1 (The HEMA Shop) £52 (with club discount) + shipping

Will see you all the way up from drilling to fairly intensive sparring.

Recommendation: Allstar Fencing Coaching Mask CEN 2 (Allstar UK) £156 + shipping
Very durable mask, will be permitted gear for any tournament.

Alternatives:

Leon Paul MFA Tournament Mask, purely because I want someone to show up one day wearing that piece of insanity.

Gajardoni - expensive, but very good.

PBT.

Gloves

Starter: Red Dragon HEMA Sparring Gloves (The HEMA Shop) £48.60 (with club discount) + shipping

Despite the name, these are unsuitable for anything but drilling or low intensity sparring with longswords. They're pretty good for those activities, however, and they can be suitable for sparring with some complex-hilted swords.

Recommendation: Sparring Gloves Mittens (Sparring Gloves) €150 + shipping
Great all round for protection, with a nice lightweight profile and decent dexterity.

Alternatives:

Sparring Gloves Special - these five-finger variants are popular for their improved dexterity, but some remain unconvinced by the resin protection on the fingers.

SPES Heavies - bulky as hell, but no better protection out there as long as you get the added fingertip protectors.

ProGauntlet - best glove ever, will never be released.

Jacket

Recommendation: AP Fencing Jacket (SPES) £160 + shipping (The HEMA Shop)

Padding all over, blade catcher on the throat, front zip. No muss, no fuss. Can also be ordered at a higher cost with customisation on size, colour etc.

Alternatives:

SPES AP Light - less padding all over, but has removable/moddable protective inserts in certain areas. Much lighter and cooler to fence in than the classic AP, and machine washable! Protection may need beefing up with modular padding for really heavy sparring/tournament use.

Black Armoury - has a big, big collar for Protect(ing) Ya Neck (Wu Tang Clan, 1992)

Gorget

Recommendation: Roughneck (Destroyer Modz) €32 + shipping (Black Armoury)

Comfortable, super minimalist and lightweight, but does the job well and can be modded to fit with a hairdryer and a pair of scissors.

Alternatives:

Leon Paul - beefy. All ABS construction. Pricey!

Red Dragon - good, rigid protector, can't go wrong with it.

Winter Tree Crafts - leather and steel construction. Very cool.

Balefire Blades - another cool leather one.

Groin Protector

Recommendation: Red Dragon HEMA Groin Protector (The HEMA Shop) £8 (with club discount) + shipping

Secure. Protective, even against direct hits to that most worrying of areas.

Alternatives:

Pretty much any rigid sporting groin protector.

Chest Protector

Recommendation: Chest Protector OR Extended Chest Protector (PBT) €25.01-€31.75 + shipping

It's a rigid piece of plastic that goes over your chest. The extended version has an extra piece that extends over the stomach.

Alternatives:

Leon Paul, or really any sport fencing supplier.

Elbow Protection

Recommendation: Shell Elbow Protectors (SPES) £15.95 (£44 with Vectir forearm guards) + shipping (The HEMA Shop)

Can be attached to SPES jackets, for more secure protection.

Alternatives:

Kvetun Armoury - good solid plastic protectors, can also come with forearm protection.

Knee Protection

Recommendation: Red Dragon HEMA Knee & Shin Protectors (The HEMA Shop) £35 (with club discount) + shipping

They take up a lot of bag space, but they're tough and provide good coverage with good mobility.

Alternatives:

UltraFlex KneePro - if you can get them in the UK for £30 or less, these are great.

Kvetun Armoury - great protection for the whole leg, and look really cool.

You can also get breeches with built-in knee protectors, but bear in mind that these may not conform closely to the knee, which may lead to gaps as you move.

Mask Overlay/Back of Head Protection

Recommendation: Unity Pro Overlay (SPES) £62 + shipping (The HEMA Shop)

Necessary extra padding on top of the mask, very necessary rigid plates on the back of the head and neck.

Alternatives:

SPES Trinity overlay - similar to the Unity, but has a neck guard as well. Extra protection is nice, although some people find it interferes with movement.

Forearm Guards

Recommendation: Kool Beans (Destroyer Modz) €30 + shipping (Black Armoury)

If you don't get one of the above forearm & elbow sets, these lovely low-profile guards will fit on or under a jacket.

Alternatives:

See elbow protection above

Shin Guards

Recommendation: Hockey shin guards £Cheap

Honestly, if you don't get the Red Dragon knee & shin guards, any decent set of hockey guards will do for shins.

Alternatives:

SPES

Breeches

Recommendation: Locust Fencing Pants (SPES) £81.90 + shipping (The HEMA Shop)

Good broken blade protection, good padding.

Alternatives:

Leon Paul - very similar to SPES

High Hill Pants - EXTREME PUFFINESS

PBT - offers a lightweight elastic option with good mobility, or a heavier pair with built-in padding and knee protection.

Staff

Drilling Recommendation: Red Oak Bo Staff ([Playwell](#)) £18.99 + £9.99 shipping (eBay)

This is our recommendation for drilling and very light sparring. Any higher intensity is too dangerous.

Sparring Recommendation: Rattan Bo Staff ([Blitz](#)) £19.99 + £6.50 shipping

These can be used for higher intensity sparring, with the trade-off that they are too light and whippy for drilling, since they don't provide a realistic simulation of the weapon.

Alternatives:

Ash is a good alternative to oak.

Dagger

Recommendation: Cold Steel Rondel Training Dagger ([Southern Swords](#)) £13 + £8.50 shipping

Made of polypropylene, these have enough flex to be safe for sparring, without being floppy.

Note: these can be found in various online stores, although stock in the UK can be scarce sometimes. The club does have a number of spares, however!

Alternatives:

There are some flexible, safe-tipped steel options out there, but the CS trainers do the job well enough that we think it's not worth spending the extra scratch.

Wood rondels look lovely, but are not safe as they do not flex.

Dussack

Recommendation: Faceless Fencer Rubber Dussack £60

Rugged plastic and rubber construction. Comfortable to use and comfortable to be hit with, as well as being excellent in the bind due to the rubber blade. These can be ordered in the club; just ask one of the club officers.

Alternatives:

Black Fencer - Storta, €72 + shipping - based on the Italian cousin of the dussack, these are quite sturdy and handle very well. They are a little stiff, so caution is required when thrusting.
Black Armoury - Arcem Meyer 1570, €110 + shipping - synthetic & leather dussacks based on those depicted in Joachim Meyer's 1570 Art of Combat.

Pugilism / Pad Work

Recommendation: RDX T6 MMA Grappling Gloves

Easy to get on and off quickly, good wrist support and knuckle/finger protection. £22 with free delivery seems to be a reasonable price for good protection and a quality build.

Alternatives:

Any of the gloves on the RDX site, generally the boxing gloves will give more protection to the hands and wrists but the MMA gloves are more flexible and easy to use. If you prefer, you will find multiple alternatives online by searching for MMA (or Boxing) gloves.