

Hand-to-Hand Stage Combat Terms and Definitions

Attacker -- The attacker is the combatant initiating the technique such as a punch, kick, or slap.

Victim -- The victim is the combatant on the receiving end of any attack. Combatants can potentially change roles from attacker to victim many times throughout the fight.

Fight Distance - The correct spacing between you and your partner should be at least 3 to 4 feet apart. Check distance by having the taller student (the one with the longer arms) reach out toward the partner with a straight arm. The hand should be at least 6 – 8 inches from the partner’s chest. This allows for maximum safety while maintaining the illusion of reality.

Breath -- Remember to breathe throughout the fight no matter how much physical exertion is needed. Since breath and voice are linked, this will help you to vocalize during rehearsals and while performing fight techniques. It will also help the body to relax.

Tension --Avoid becoming too tense when performing the fight. Excessive tension gets in the way of body control and quickly tires you out.

Eye Contact--Making eye contact prior to each and every sequence in the fight is a constant reminder to be ready and prepared for the next sequence. For example eye contact is made between the combatants before a slap is thrown to help both the attacker and victim prepare for the next move. The attacker knows the victim is ready to react and the victim knows the attacker is ready to initiate the next move. It is not necessary to maintain constant eye contact, but it is important to “check in” before each technique, and during potentially dangerous moves.

Stance and Balance--Always stand with your weight centered, your legs at least shoulder width apart, and with your knees slightly bent. This stance allows for freedom of movement in all directions. If your weight is leaning on one leg or the other, it will be hard to change directions when needed.

Cueing --The signal given from you to your partner at predetermined times throughout the fight. Cues should be choreographed into the fight at specific places to establish each other’s readiness to continue. All cues are made either physically (a touch, or a push for example), vocally (a yell or grunt for example), verbally (a line from the play for example), or through eye contact.

Contact Blow--A blow delivered to a major muscle group that actually strikes the victim and produces a realistic sound. The energy of the contact punch or kick is always pulled.

Pulling the Energy--Pulling the energy of a strike means the quick withdrawal of the punching or kicking action to avoid potential injury to the victim’s major muscle group.

Non-Contact--A blow delivered with the illusion of contact, a non-contact punch always misses its target by 6 – 8 inches or more.

Reverse Energy--Reverse energy is the concept of energy moving away from the attacker’s target area to protect the victim. For example, when a strangulation is performed the attacker actually pulls the energy away from the victim while the victim holds the attacker’s hand in place to stabilize the contact. This “reverse energy” results in a technique that is safe for the combatants.

Masking--Masking is the concept of hiding a moment of contact so that it will look as if the blow has struck its target. This is always true of non-contact blows and sometimes true of contact lows. All techniques need to mask the knap and fighting distance from the audience.

Timing--Good timing is crucial to the effectiveness of a good stage fight. Avoid anticipating the fight moves either by rushing the attack or reacting before the blow is delivered. Reacting too late also makes the fight look unrealistic.

B.L.O.O.D. – Acronym for Balance, Line of sight, Eye Contact (two O's are the eyes), and Distance. If there is ever a fight being done that is unsafe, yell this out loud so they know there is something they are forgetting.

Noncontact Strike – Illusion of contact on blow masked from the audience with a well-timed knap (you always miss the target).

Eye Contact – Technique of frequent cueing your partner by looking into their eyes during a fight, in order to assure connection between partners.

Avoidance – A movement to dodge attack.

Invitation – Temptation for partner to attack.

Performance Speed – Stage combat should always be first rehearsed in slow-motion and slowly get faster. There are four performance speeds: $\frac{1}{4}$ speed (slow-motion), $\frac{1}{2}$ speed (a little faster than slow-motion), $\frac{3}{4}$ speed (almost full speed) and full speed.

Break Fall – Any maneuver that dissipates the energy or force from a fall or roll and gives the illusion of impact.

Side Fall – Bend your knees and fall with the majority of the impact on your thighs (not your knees) and then sprawl out the hands in the direction of the fall to help send the force out.

Back Fall – Step back with one foot and bend down so one leg is completely bent underneath your bottom and the other foot is in front. Curl backwards and put your arms out to the side and make a smacking sound with your arms, palms down with your feet sprawling up to make it look and sound good (be careful to not bang your head down).

Front Fall – Take a step forward and to the right with your right foot. Bend down on your right foot and then “jump off” of your foot to the left and send your energy with both arms and legs extended as much as possible (don't try to catch yourself too much with your arms – sort of send out the energy in a superman-like way), so your impact with the floor is more like sliding on the floor than falling on the floor.

Shared Fall – This is a more advanced fall that involves one person standing facing their attacker. The attacker goes towards the victim with both arms extended out to the side. As they come in contact with the victim, the attacker's arm comes across the victim's chest, and the victim falls backwards with a back fall as the attacker falls forward with a front fall. The fall should be timed precisely so the victim is not actually pushed over by the attacker to make this move as safe as possible.

Knap – Sound created by actors to make a sound with their own bodies that mimics the sound of the blow.

- **Body Knap** – The sound made by striking a major muscle group on the body. Either partner can make this knap.
- **Clap Knap** – The sound made when both hands clap together, usually made by the victim.
- **Slip Hand Knap** – The attacker claps hands and follows through during the act of delivering the strike.

- **Shared Knap** – The sound made when the attacker’s open hand meets his partner’s open hand or major muscle group.

Punch – Hit with a closed hand or fist.

To stomach – Punch with whole body, but pull back the energy right after the hit, and open the hand as it hits the stiff, contracted stomach to make a good body knap sound.

To face – Always avoid hitting the face. An actor should never experience face contact during a stage combat scene.

- **John Wayne** – If right-handed, have feet shoulder-length apart and left foot in-between the victim’s feet, and rest left hand on the victim’s right shoulder (the fighters should be facing each other). Pull back right-hand and punch across face, and open the hand to clap the hands together as they go in front of the victim’s face to make a good slip hand knap sound. Clench the fist again after making the knap.
- **Front Jab** – Fighters face each other and do a quick jab to the face, but hit own body for knap sound as partner reacts to the punch by throwing head back.

Slap – Hit with an open hand.

To face:

- **Shared knap** – The partner being hit holds open hand under their chin with elbow close to side (audience is to their back). The partner hitting, slaps the open hand to make the sound, and right after the hit, the partner holds hand that was just hit to their cheek that was “hit”.
- **Clap knap** – The partner being hit claps their hands and reacts to the slap as their partner moves their hand across the front of their partner’s face (keeping a safe distance from the face).

Kick

- **To face (on the ground)** – Although this move is possible to do while standing, it is best done with one combatant on the floor (on their side) while the other is still standing. The person on the floor cups both hands in front and just below their face and the person kicking winds up and kicks the cupped hands to make a knap sound while the person being kicked reacts to the kick by throwing back their head. The kicker should be careful to make it look like they are kicking harder than they actually are so the actor’s hands are not hurt when they are kicked. The best way to do the kick is to have the foot pointed, so the top of the flat foot comes in contact with the hands to make the knap sound.
- **To stomach (on the ground)** – This can be done just like the face kick described above except a grunt is substituted for the knap sound. The kick can be done either with the victim on the ground on their side or with the victim crawling on their hands and knees. Both times the foot should be pointed and flat and if contact is made, the energy should be pulled back so that actual contact is minimized. The best way for the victim to react to a kick is to jump up and arch their back upon impact.
- **To stomach (standing)** – This should be carefully done with the foot again extended and pointed and the flat, top part of the boot carefully placed to come in contact with a flexed and flat stomach, with the victim reaching with a grunt and arching their back (but not too early!).

- **To groin** –the kick is carefully placed to the inside thigh just below the groin area. In a high school setting, it is an accident waiting to happen, but I included it just so you know that it exists.

Knee Attack

- **To stomach** – Similar to the kick to the stomach when standing, but is best for those who are not physically inclined. The knee comes up in front of the stomach, although no actual contact is made. The best reaction is a victim jumping and arching their back with a painful grunt.

Elbow Attack

- **To face** - Striking side of face with one elbow and using the palm of the other hand to slap the lower forearm for knap effect. Avoid contact to the face. Partner needs to react by turning head with direction of the elbow.
- **To body** - Elbow with whole body, but pull back the energy right after the hit, and open the hand as it hits the stiff, contracted stomach to make a good body knap sound.