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## Your First Equipment Purchase

This document has been created to provide some thoughts and suggestions for beginning fencers (and their parents, if applicable) who want to purchase their own equipment. What's an equipment buying guide without unasked for opinions? When you see a picture and gray text, you're reading my personal opinion on a topic.

### Should You Purchase Equipment?

If you have not yet completed the "Introduction to Fencing" class, then we recommend that you do not purchase equipment. The club has jackets, foils, masks and gloves that you can use for practice when learning to fence.

As with most hobbies, it is easy to get excited about fencing and want to have your own equipment. After all, it is always more comfortable to have your own stuff. However, as with most hobbies, there will be some people who find that fencing isn't for them, or the excitement may wear off and you want to move on to something else. Completing the Introduction class gives you time to determine if fencing is for you. If it is (and we hope it is!) then it is time to decide what to purchase.

### What to Purchase

As this document is targeted at beginning fencers, we recommend that your first purchase be a "foil starter set". Almost all fencing equipment vendors offer starter sets. Go to the ["About Equipment"](#) page on the Conejo Fencing Club site for links to fencing supply vendors.

While sets from some vendors may contain additional items (such as a fencing bag), most starter sets contain the following four items:

- Jacket – Can be denim or stretch nylon.
- Practice foil – A practice foil has a rubber tip at the end and can not be used for competition.
- Mask – The most important protective device you'll own, as most people feel their eyes are important!
- Glove – Not only provides protection, but also helps you to grip your foil.

Let's take a look at each of these items individually.

### The Jacket

Most jackets offered with starter sets are going to be denim (cotton) jackets. Any jacket you get with a set will provide great protection. What you need to know when ordering:

- Size – Get a cloth tape measure and measure your chest. Or have someone measure for you.
- Front zip or back zip – Unless you are ambidextrous and plan to fence both left and right handed (or you are double jointed and can reach all the way down your back), it is highly recommend that you request a front zip jacket. This will be an additional cost for the starter set from most vendors, but the author thinks the convenience is well worth it.
- Hand – You should specify whether you fence left or right handed. This determines where the zipper will be placed for front zip jackets.
- Sex – Yes, there is a difference between men's and women's jackets.
- Material – To stretch or not to stretch? Most starter sets come standard with a denim (cotton) jacket. These provide good protection, but they are a little bit stiff. Fencing jackets can also be made from stretch nylon. The nylon jackets are generally a little more comfortable, but "whips" may hurt a little more. Most vendors will allow you to specify a stretch jacket in the starter set for an additional cost. Which material you prefer is a matter of personal preference.

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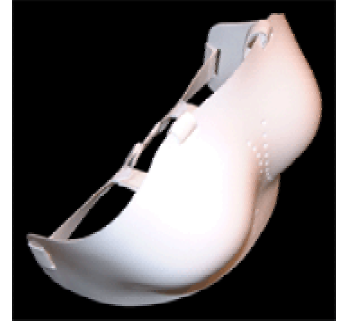
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## Chest Protectors

If you are a female fencer, or purchasing equipment for a female fencer, you should also purchase a chest protector. This is not included in the starter set from most vendors, but should be added to your purchase. Chest protection comes in two types: The one piece and the “hubcaps.” Which you prefer is a matter of personal preference. The one piece provides better coverage, but may be less comfortable.

The one piece – Constructed of a single piece of plastic with arm straps, it goes across the chest and does a good job of protection. These are generally sized the same as bras. See the picture to the right.

Hubcaps – These are small, round plastic cups that resemble hubcaps (or yarmulkes). They are placed in pockets located in the chest of women’s jackets. This is the main difference between men’s and women’s jackets. I’m sure the cut is a bit different as well.



## The Foil

Foil starter sets will provide a practice foil has a rubber tip at the end and can not be used for competition. These foils are designed (amazingly enough) for practice and do not contain the electric wires, tips and springs needed for competition foils. This makes them much less expensive than electric foils.

What you need to know when ordering:

- Size – Yes, there are sizes. A standard foil uses a “# 5” blade. What that means is that the blade is 35 inches. For most people, this is what you want.
- If you are purchasing for a small child, who finds a standard foil to be too heavy, you may want to ask for a “# 2” blade. You should know by the end of the “Introduction to Fencing” class whether a smaller blade is desired.
- Hand – Left or right.
- Grip – Ahh, now we’re entering the realm of opinion. The “default” grip for most foil starter sets is the French grip. (An example is shown to the right).
- However, it has been our experience at the club that most fencers prefer to use a “pistol” grip when fencing. There are many, many different types of pistol grips that can be used with a foil. Most vendors will allow you to specify a pistol grip for your starter set, for an additional fee. If you are unsure what type of pistol grip to get, the “Belgium” grip is quite popular.



Pistol grips by themselves are generally about \$10. Any pistol grip can be replaced with any other pistol grip on your weapon. So if you are less than happy with your original grip, you can always replace it for a reasonable price. Feel free to ask other fencers at the club what type of grip they use, and if you can hold their weapon to determine how it feels in your hand.

## The Mask

Any mask you receive with a starter set will provide excellent protection for your face and should be legal for any local competition. What you need to know when ordering:

- Size – Mask size is generally measured using the vertical circumference around the head. See the illustration below.



## The Glove

You will generally receive a foil glove that should serve you well. Some gloves are leather, some are of a washable fabric. Once again, gloves material really comes down to a matter of personal preference. What you need to know when ordering:

- Size – Glove size is generally measured on your fencing hand at its widest point (just below knuckles) in inches (excluding the thumb), then add half an inch to the measurement to establish your glove size. See the illustration below.



## Additional Items

In addition to the above starter set items, there are a few other things you might want to consider when making your first order.

### Equipment Bag

This item is not needed when all you have is the four items listed above. However, if you think you'll be purchasing more equipment at some point, you might want to consider an equipment bag.



In my experience, fencing equipment bags are either poor quality or good quality, but overpriced. I have had very good luck in using golf bags, such as those found at Costco. The one I have cost about \$40, has wheels and has stayed in good shape for the five years or so I've had it. If you do have multiple weapons, a good way to ensure they don't poke through your bag is to buy some PVC pipe, cut to length for your weapon, put a cap on it, and keep your weapons inside a piece of pipe.

### Shoes



For practice and casual fencing, almost any type of court shoe will provide good enough traction and support. They do make fencing shoes, but once again, due to the low number of fencers in the world, the prices for fencing shoes are relatively high.

## How to Purchase

Almost all fencing equipment vendors have web sites that you can visit to find out prices and other information about their products. Go to the "[About Equipment](#)" page on the Conejo Fencing Club site for links to fencing supply vendors.

When you are making your first equipment purchase, we **highly recommend** that you **call** the vendor to make the order. Why? To ensure that you get what you need. All of the vendors that I have called have been both courteous and helpful. Tell them that you are new to fencing and that you are making your first equipment order. They will work with you to help ensure that you get the equipment and sizes that you need. If you receive your equipment and it does not fit as desired, all vendors I have used are happy to exchange the product for the correct size, without any hassles.

The Fencing Post offers discounted prices for online purchases. However, if you tell them you are a web site customer when placing your order over the phone, they will give you the online discount.

**Note:** Illustrations have been borrowed from the Leon Paul USA and Triplette Competition Arms web sites.

Please send any comments or suggestions to [Dan](#).

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## Handy Ordering Checklist

This ordering checklist can be used to write down the pertinent information for the items you are going to order. If you enjoy comparison shopping, you can also print multiple copies to compare the offerings and costs from various vendors.

Item #	Size	Hand	Description	Cost
<b>Fencing Jacket</b>				
		L    R		
<b>Foil</b>				
	2    5	L    R		
<b>Mask</b>				
		N/A		
<b>Glove</b>				
		L    R		
<b>Chest Protector</b>				
		N/A		
<b>Other Items</b>				
<b>Subtotal</b>				
<b>Tax</b>				
<b>Total</b>				