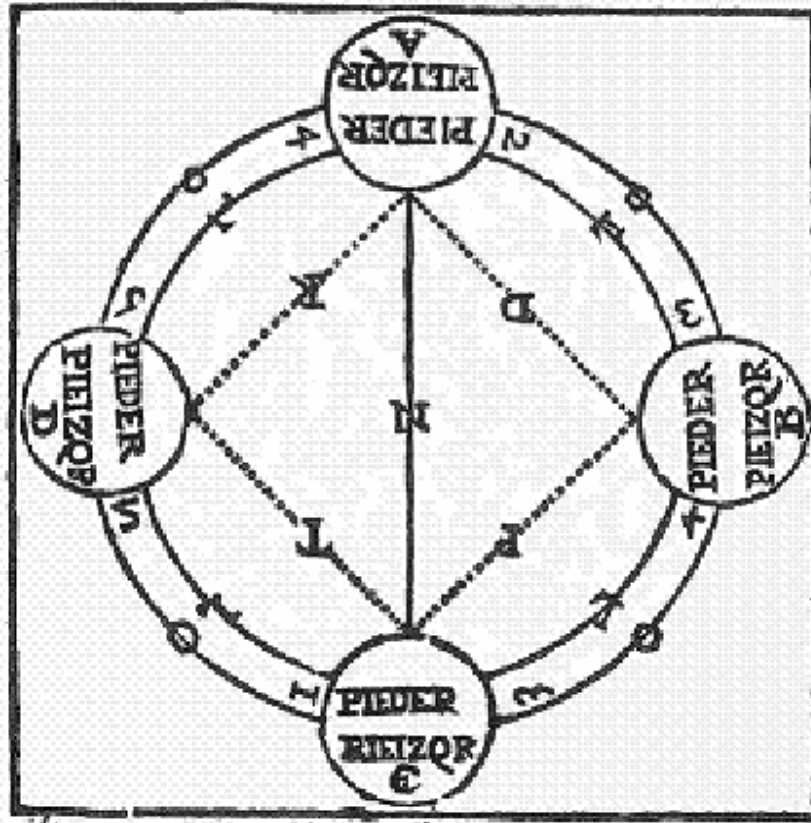


La Regla del Movimiento

The Rule of the Movement



There is not a wound without movement.
~ Carranza

A method for practicing and teaching Spanish footwork – Part III

By Puck and Mary Curtis
August 4, 2006

This is the third in a series of articles on Spanish fencing and builds on the information found in *El Círculo y la Cruz* and *El Primer Fundamento*.

The following is a work containing both translation and interpretation of primary sources that reflects the authors' current understanding. The authors welcome critical commentary and peer review.

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Advanced Footwork and Exceptions to the Rules

Before you attempt any of the footwork described here, you should be comfortable with a general rule of Spanish footwork:

Never cross your feet

You should be comfortable stepping with the right foot first when moving right and with the left foot first when moving left. When you advance, you should step with the lead foot first, and when you retreat, you should step with rear foot first. All of this should be unconscious and natural. If you still have trouble keeping your feet from crossing when you move, keep practicing and come back to this section later.

The worst thing you can do is to change the rules while you are building the foundation of your footwork. Once you can close your eyes, snap your fingers, and recite Don Quixote¹ without crossing your feet as you practice the footwork, you can start working on the exceptions.

Passing Steps

In Romeo and Juliet the character, Mercutio, takes an opportunity to taunt the villain, Tybalt, about a passing step during a duel.

***Mercutio:** Good king of cats, nothing but one of your nine lives; that I mean to make bold withal, and, as you shall use me hereafter, drybeat the rest of the eight. Will you pluck your sword out of his pitcher by the ears? Make haste, lest mine be about your ears ere it be out.*

***Tybalt:** I am for you.
[Drawing]*

***Romeo:** Gentle Mercutio, put thy rapier up.*

***Mercutio:** Come, sir, your passado.
[They fight]*

In Italian fencing, the *passata* is a passing or pivoting step forward with the rear foot and Shakespeare refers to this technique. The Spanish have an analogous piece of footwork used as part of a blade technique called the *Movement of Conclusion*² that ends with a disarmament. By stepping forward with the rear foot to completely pivot the body so that the left shoulder is forward, the fencer breaks the general rule of footwork. It is important

¹ It is interesting to note that in Chapter 19, Don Quixote has a duel that demonstrates Destreza. Cervantes also praises Carranza by name in his Song of Calliope.

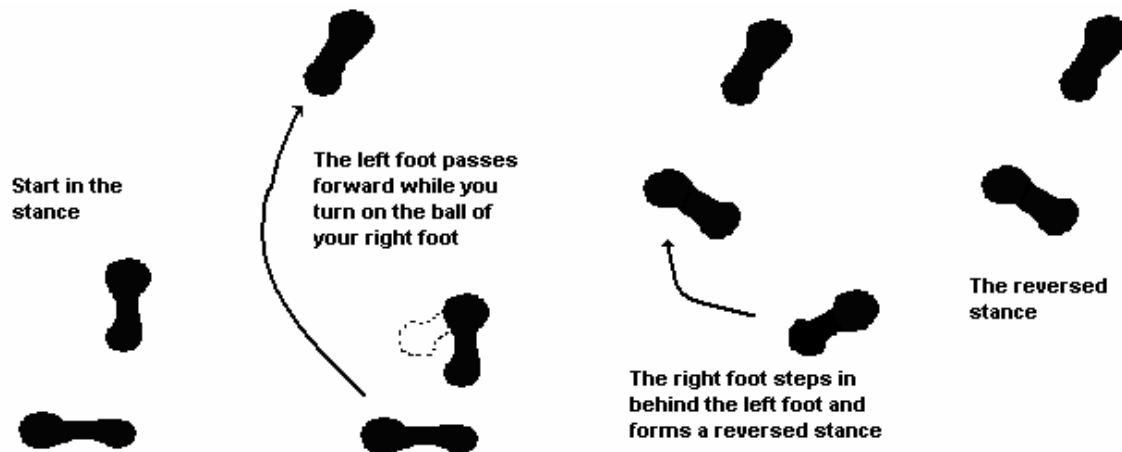
² *Conclusión* is defined in the Academia Autoridades (volume C), 1729 – “Disarm. In fencing it is the action to disarm the adversary. Lat. *Adversarii in pugna subjugatio*. Narv. Destr. fol.210. And executed in another form [way] and time the disarm of the sword, is very risky.”

to know when this technique is appropriate because it can be dangerous. However, when used well, it will *conclude* the fight.

When your opponent presents an engagement or attack that is strongly committed on the outside line, you can take advantage of that commitment by taking a pivoting step forward and grabbing your adversary's hilt with your left hand. Once you have control of your opponent's hilt, you can thrust or cut at will and there is very little your opponent can do about it.

Note: The Movement of Conclusion can be a dangerous technique because it opens your torso and hips during the pivoting step. It is absolutely vital that you have control of the opponent's sword when you do this.

The Footwork used with the Movement of Conclusion



Drill 1 - The Movement of Conclusion

This drill will help you learn the footwork associated with the Movement of Conclusion.

1. Start in the Spanish stance without swords. Have your weight centered and the Vulgo facing you. Each of you should extend your arm forward with your index finger pointing at your adversary and making contact with the back of your opponent's palm.
2. The Vulgo exerts pressure on the back of your hand and he may turn his palm down to push with the edge of his hand.
3. When this happens, rotate your right hand so that it is palm down and step forward with your left foot in a complete 180-degree pivot. Seize the adversary's right wrist with your left hand.
4. You can simulate an attack with the right hand in the same action. You should be in a reversed stance with your left foot forward and your weight centered.

Note: Be careful not to damage your training partners! After all, they are not really vulgar if they are helping you train.

Start slowly with this drill and build up your speed with practice. Learn to sense the pressure on the hand and immediately pivot forward. If you become comfortable with this drill, you will respond very quickly to committed pressure on the outside line. When the Movement of Conclusion is performed well, it can be catastrophic to the adversary and it leaves him in a very bad position.

Build on this Drill

1. Have the Vulgo vary the amount of pressure on the back of your hand.
2. Try the drill with your eyes closed.
3. Start from the inside line and let the Vulgo disengage to the outside before he makes contact or a committed attack on the outside line.
4. Experiment with the size of the steps you take to see how this changes the technique.
5. Try it with very tall and very short opponents to see what changes.
6. Is it possible to use a Movement of Conclusion and a thrust in the same action?
7. How would you detect a feint on the outside line? Can you tell by touch alone when the Vulgo is committed?
8. What could you do with this footwork if you were holding a dagger in your left hand?

Transverse Compasses

There are some occasions when the Spaniards will use angular steps and may cross their feet. There are four basic diagonal steps possible and these are called the *Transverse Compasses*³.

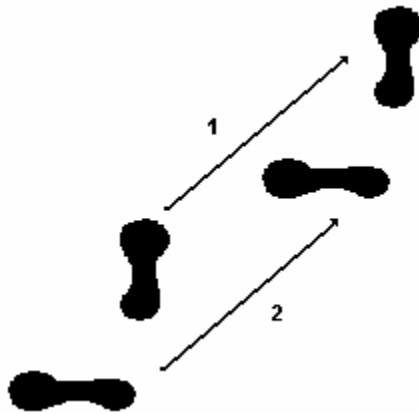
Transverse steps are part of a larger category of steps called *Mixed Compasses*⁴ which include steps that move in any two cardinal directions at the same time. Both curved and transverse compasses are considered mixed compasses.

For the moment, think of each pair of steps (one step with the right foot and one step with the left) as a single unit of footwork like an advance or a retreat. Later we will leave this idea behind as we look at more advanced footwork.

³ *Compas transversal* is defined under in the Academia Autoridades (volume C), 1729 – “In fencing it is that which one makes by [to, through] whichever of the sides or lines of the rectilinear angle imagined in the common circle.”

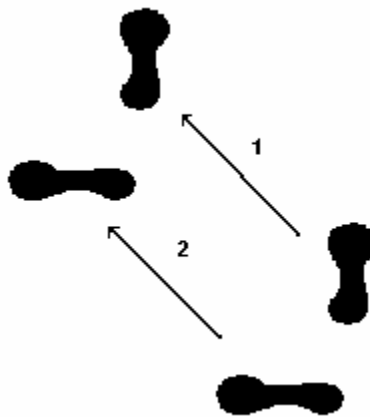
⁴ *Compas mixto* is defined under in the Academia Autoridades (volume C), 1729 – “In fencing it is that which is composed of the straight and the curved, or of the strange [distant] and that of trepidation.”

Transverse Compass Forward to the Right



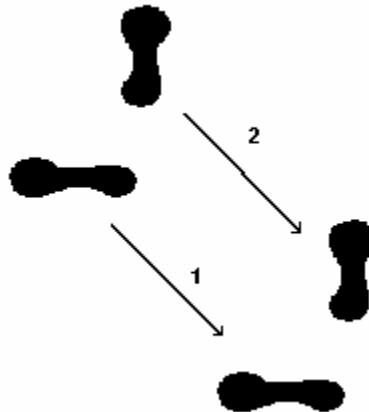
Advance with your right foot towards the right side and then advance your left foot, returning to stance. You might use this footwork as a counterattack to a lunge.

Transverse Compass Forward to the Left (Crossing Step)



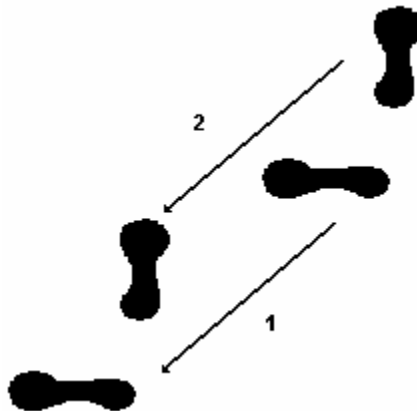
Advance with your right foot towards the left side and then advance your left, returning to stance. You might use a diagonal advance to the left to engage the adversary's sword on the inside line and threaten with the point of your sword.

Transverse Compass Backward and Right (Crossing Step)



Retreat with your left foot towards the right side and then retreat with your right, returning to stance. You might use a diagonal retreat to reestablish the Measure of Proportion when an opponent moves forward.

Transverse Compass Backward and Left



Retreat with your left foot towards the left side and then retreat with your right, returning to stance. You might use a diagonal retreat to reestablish the Measure of Proportion when an opponent moves forward and simultaneously change the line of engagement to the outside line.

Note: Some more advanced transverse steps require you to pre-turn the foot when you step.

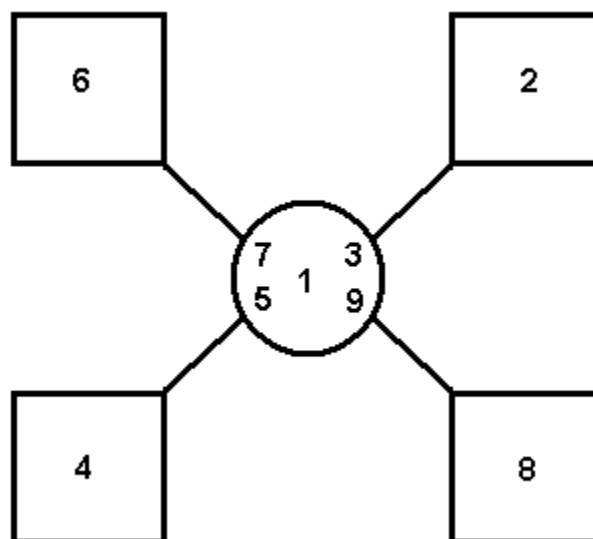
Drill 2 – Practicing Transverse Steps

This drill will help you practice transverse steps by executing footwork repeatedly around a center point.

1. Start in the Spanish stance without a sword. Center your weight and relax.
2. Start by taking a transverse step forward and to the right. Your right foot should move first followed by your left foot.
3. Return to the center by taking a transverse step backward and to the left. Your left foot should move first followed by your right foot.
4. Take another transverse step backward and to the left. Your left foot should move first followed by your right foot.
5. Return to the center by taking a transverse step forward and to the right. Your right foot should move first followed by your left foot.
6. Take a transverse step forward and to the left. Your right foot should move first followed by your left foot. (This may feel awkward because your feet will cross.)
7. Return to the center by taking a transverse step backward and to the right. Your left foot should move first followed by your right foot. (Your feet will cross.)
8. Take another transverse step backward and to the right. Your left foot should move first followed by your right foot. (Your feet will cross.)
9. Return to the center by taking a transverse step forward and to the left. Your right foot should move first followed by your left foot. (Your feet will cross.)
10. Continue the drill using the same pattern.

For your reference, the drill is laid out in the image below using the same notation introduced in the first footwork paper, El Circulo y la Cruz. Each number indicates the position of a step in the drill described above.

Notation of the Footwork used in Drill 4

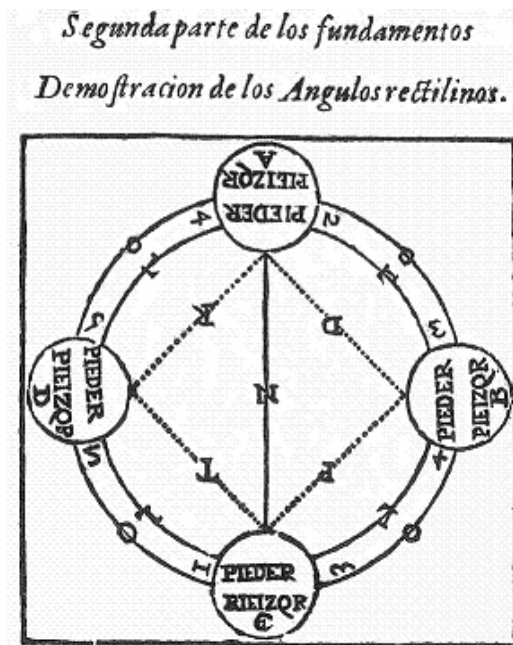


Remember to finish each step in a good stance. Relax and avoid locking your knees or leaning your body out of position. Think of a transverse step as a single unit of footwork that consists of moving each foot once.

Build on this Drill

1. Vary the size of the steps.
2. Vary the order of the steps. (You could try a step forward to the right, followed by a step forward to the left, followed by a step backward to the left, and a step backward to the right. Experiment and change the patterns so that you are comfortable stepping in any direction at a moment's notice.)
3. Try the drill with a partner so that you can gauge your distance.
4. Try using advances, retreats, sidesteps, and circular steps as part of larger patterns that include the transverse steps.
5. Try the transverse step followed with a Movement of Conclusion.

Pacheco's Major Circle from The Greatness of the Sword



Second part of the foundations
Demonstration of the rectilinear Angles.

Note: The abbreviated text in each circle reads “RIGHT FOOT” and “LEFT FOOT” with the right foot being closer to the center than the left foot.

Unlike circular steps (or curved compasses), transverse steps forward are often used to close distance. A circular step moves along the imaginary circle and the measure of proportion remains the same. A transverse compass moves along the diagonal (the square shown in the image above) and is closer to the opponent.

Transverse steps backward are often used to regain the measure of proportion when the opponent moves forward.

It is possible to pre-turn your foot when you take the step so that you end in stance with your lead foot pointed at the opponent. You can use an action like this to aggressively gain the opponent's blade as you step forward or to retreat with your body profiled and the blade threatening the adversary. We can use the imaginary circle to map out the footwork so that we can better understand the angles.

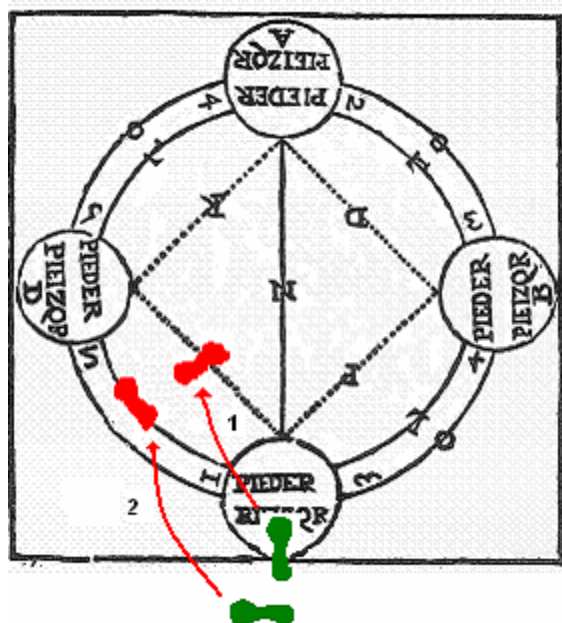
The next two drills are examples of how to visualize the footwork within the imaginary circle during a transverse step.

Drill 3 – Transverse Step and the Circle (Forward)

The footwork is shown overlaid on Pacheco's Major Circle below. Use the circle as a mental tool to set the distance and placement of your footwork.

1. Start in the Spanish stance with your weight centered and without a sword. Imagine a partner facing you. Remember that you stand on the edge of an imaginary circle with the Diameter extending out from your front toe.
2. Imagine that inside the circle is a perfect square like the one shown and step along the line of the square to the left with the right foot. (See the diagram below.) Pre-turn the foot so that it points back to the right at your imaginary opponent when it lands. (I find that withdrawing the hips and leaning forward slightly makes this easier.)
3. Take a curved step left with the left foot to return to the Spanish stance with your weight centered.

The Major Circle with the Footwork Overlaid



Note: The green footprints indicate the starting position and the red footprints indicate the final position. The right foot is pre-turned to face the opponent and the left foot falls into the normal stance behind it.

In one example from The New Science, Pacheco says that an imaginary line extending from the lead toe should cross the Diameter.

...he will make a transversal compass with the right foot to the opposite side: and turning the point of the foot to the right rectitude, so, that the line that from it one imagines leaving, cuts that line of the diameter, that before was common,...

You can see that if we drew a line from the toe of the right foot in the image above, it would cross the Diameter. Pre-turning your right foot helps to bring your sword shoulder into line and profiles your body to reduce target area against a possible counterattack.

Build on this Drill

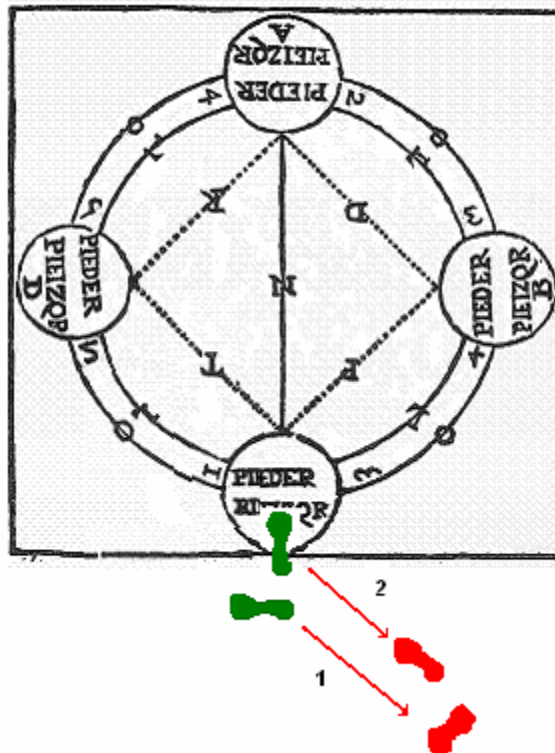
1. Vary the size of the steps.
2. Try a transverse step forward and to the right with a pre-turned foot.
3. Which transverse step forward would you use engaging a blade on the inside?
4. Which transverse step forward would you use engaging a blade on the outside?
5. Try this drill with a partner to help gauge the distance.

Drill 4 - Transverse Step and the Circle (Backward)

The footwork is shown overlaid on Pacheco's Major Circle below. Use the circle as a mental tool to set the distance and placement of your footwork.

1. Start in the Spanish stance with your weight centered and without a sword. Imagine a partner facing you. Remember that you stand on the edge of an imaginary circle with the Diameter extending out from your front toe.
2. Step back and to the right with the left foot. Pre-turn the left foot away from the imaginary opponent.
3. Step right and back with the right foot to return to the Spanish stance with your weight centered.

The Major Circle with the Footwork Overlaid



Note: The green footprints indicate the starting position and the red footprints indicate the final position. Assuming the opponent executed a rapid advance, the right foot is pre-turned to face the opponent and the left foot falls into the normal stance behind it.

Practice this a few times to reinforce the technique and use it to control the distance when an adversary moves forward. Pacheco's text indicates that you may step backwards to regain proper fencing distance by retreating along a diagonal path with the rear foot followed by the front foot. In one example from The New Science, Pacheco describes the step:

... making for the execution of all a mixed compass of trepidation and backwards with the left foot to the right side, continuing until the measure of proportion.

In Pacheco's example, he uses a transverse step (or mixed compass) to gain distance and reestablish the measure of proportion (proper fencing distance).

Build on this Drill

1. Vary the size of the steps.
2. Try a transverse step backward and to the left with a pre-turned foot.
3. Which transverse step forward would you use to counterattack a lunge?
4. Which transverse step forward would you use to counterattack someone using a passing step or Movement of Conclusion?
5. Try the drill with a partner to help gauge the distance.

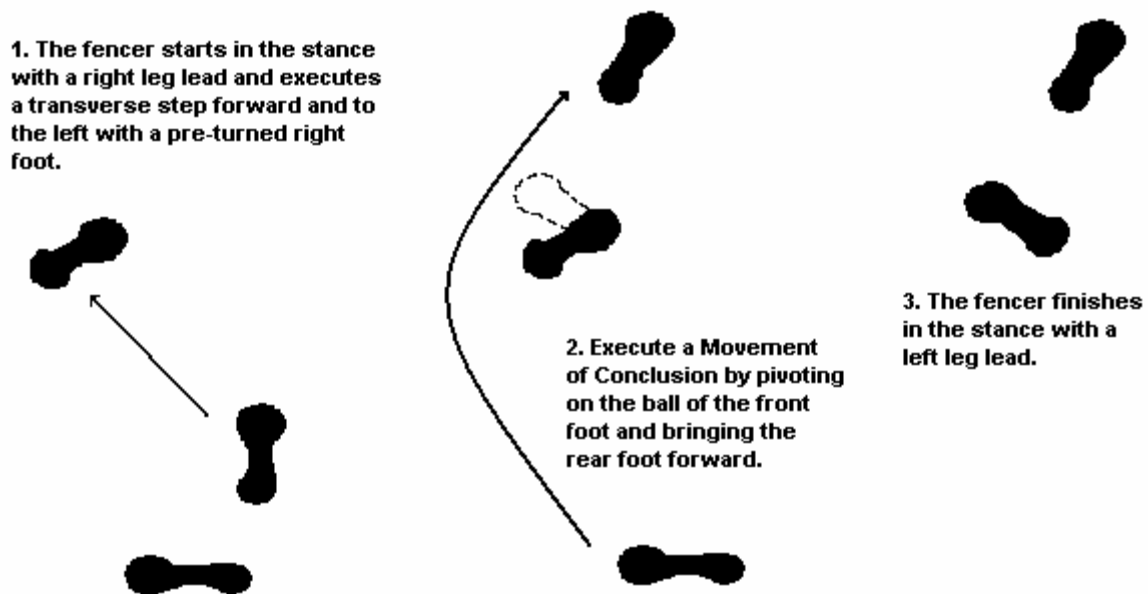
Drill 5 - Transverse Step with the Movement of Conclusion

Some pieces of footwork work well together like the transverse step and the Movement of Conclusion.

Use this drill to combine a transverse step right with a Movement of Conclusion.

1. Start in the Spanish stance with your weight centered and without a sword. Imagine a partner facing you. Remember that you stand on the edge of an imaginary circle with the Diameter extending out from your front toe.
2. Take a transverse step forward and to the left moving only the right foot. Pre-turn the foot so that it points back to the right at you imaginary opponent. (I find that withdrawing the hips and leaning forward slightly makes this easier.)
3. Using only your left foot, execute a Movement of Conclusion by taking a full pivoting step left with the left foot to return to the Spanish stance. Your weight centered and your left leg will leading. If you wish, you can simulate grabbing the adversary's hilt with your left hand.
4. You can simulate an attack with the right hand in the same action. You should be in a reversed stance with your left foot forward and your weight centered.

Two Pieces of Footwork Combined



Build on this Drill

1. Vary the size of the steps.
2. Try this with a partner.
3. Think about how this footwork might be used in an encounter.
4. Draw out the footwork using Pacheco's Major Circle to help you understand the angles and distance.

Preloading a Transverse Step⁵

Manuel Cruzado y Peralta wrote a commentary on Pacheco's New Science in 1702. One of the pieces of footwork that he describes is the transverse step followed by the Movement of Conclusion. He recommends moving the left foot forward onto the *Line of Infinity*⁶ so that the left heel is in line with the right toe. There should still be about half a foot between them.

The opponent assuming his stance in the right Angle, or a little separate from it, the Diestro will choose the measure of proportion, and he will move the left foot forward, and he will place it crossed, occupying with it the infinite line of his right foot, corresponding the heel of that one with the tip of this one, and between one, and the other there should be a half foot of distance;...

This has the effect of preloading the transverse step and giving it a longer stride. It is an awkward position and may present a larger target on the body, but when used well it can increase the reach of the Diestro's transverse step and makes their threat that much more potent. (It is similar to the classical fencing method of gaining on a lunge.)

A small step used to preload a transverse step



You might consider the final position shown above to be a weaker version of the primary stance and you should use a stance like this with caution.

⁵ Preloading a step is not a formally named piece of footwork in the Spanish school and should be considered an unusual application. While the footwork is demonstrated in Cruzado's text, there is no specific term describing the action.

⁶ See Pacheco's image of the Major Circle in Greatness of the Sword showing the Line of Infinity.

Drill 6 - Preload the Transverse step for a Movement of Conclusion

Use this drill only after you are comfortable using the transverse step and the Movement of Conclusion together as shown in Drill 5 above.

1. Start in the Spanish stance with your weight centered and without a sword. Imagine a partner facing you. Remember that you stand on the edge of an imaginary circle with the Diameter extending out from your front toe.
2. Bring your left foot forward and onto the Line of Infinity so that it lines up with your right toe. Your left foot should still be pointing left and you should have about half a foot between your right foot and your left foot.
3. Take a transverse step forward and to the left with your right foot. Pre-turn your foot so that it points back to the right at your opponent as it lands. (I find that withdrawing my hips and leaning forward slightly makes this easier.)
4. Execute a Movement of Conclusion by taking a full pivoting step left with the left foot to return to the Spanish stance with your weight centered and your left leg leading. If you wish, you can simulate grabbing the adversary's hilt with your left hand.
5. You can simulate an attack with the right hand in the same action. You should be in a reversed stance with your left foot forward and your weight centered.

Note: Preloading the transverse step by bringing your rear foot forward opens your body to attack and compromises your ability to move quickly. It does provide you with a transverse step that can travel much further, but it should be used cautiously.

Build on this Drill

1. Try using the same preloading step with other pieces of footwork to see what works and what does not.
2. Is it possible to preload a step in other ways?
3. How would you safely recover to the more conservative stance if someone attacked while your left foot was forward?

Stepping without Placing the Foot (“floating step”)⁷

In Cruzado's description of a possible counter to a crossbar lock⁸, he recommends stepping without planting the foot and then re-stepping into a better position.

... making a mixed compass of trepidation, and backwards with the left foot to the right side, and without setting down this foot, he makes another curved, or transversal, executing a strike with a thrust in the diametric line from the opponent's chest, ...

⁷ The floating step is not a formally named piece of footwork in the Spanish school and should be considered an unusual application. While the footwork is demonstrated in Cruzado's text, there is no specific term describing the action.

⁸ A “crossbar lock” is a binding action using the crossbar to pin the opponent's sword.

We will call this a “floating step” which can be used to change the angle or position of the body as well as the blades. For example, a modern epee fencer might use a reassemblment⁹ to withdraw his front leg from a low line attack and respond by attacking without completely putting weight on the front foot.

Drill 7 – The Floating Step

Try using a floating step.

1. Start in the Spanish stance with your weight centered your body relaxed.
2. Step back and to the right with your left foot without actually placing your weight on your foot.
3. Return to stance by bringing your left foot back to its original position.

This kind of step could function as a void that moves the body away from an attack and then immediately returns to the measure of proportion. It might be used as a way to change the relationship of the blades in order to dominate the adversary’s weapon.

Build on this Drill

1. Try using a floating step with your right foot or your left foot at different times.
2. Try using a floating step with other pieces of footwork. How does it change the footwork? Are you still balanced?
3. What changes when keep your foot entirely off the ground when you take the floating step?
4. Try using a floating step with your right foot when someone cuts at your front leg. Are you able to immediately counter? Does a floating step help you control measure better? Does it let you choose which line you wish to engage in after the step?
5. Try working through the Cruzado quote shown above to execute an attack with a pivoting step as described.

Floating steps can be used in a variety of circumstances but are by their nature unstable. Practice the more common footwork described by the Spanish texts and use floating steps rarely. Alternatively, pick a few techniques that could make use of floating steps and train to use them only for those techniques.

Floating steps should be an exception to your normal footwork and not the rule.

⁹ A reassemblment is a fencing maneuver in which the fencer brings both feet together, straightening the legs with the body upright and throwing the rear arm back. It is commonly used to void an attack to the low line. The fencer may counterattack with an arrest by simultaneously extending the weapon arm towards the adversary.

Footwork Terminology

The Compasses or Paces

Spanish Term	Translated Term	Definition	Execution
<i>Compas Accidental</i>	Forward Compass	A step toward your opponent along the Diameter or centerline.	The right foot advances and the left follows. When you complete the movement, you are in stance again.
<i>Compas Estraño</i>	Backward Compass	A step away from your opponent.	The left foot moves backwards, followed by the right. When you complete the movement, you are in stance again.
<i>Compas de Trepidacion</i>	Compass of Trepidation	A step to one side or the other away from the opponent at a 90-degree angle to the diameter or centerline.	When stepping to the left, move the left foot first, followed by the right. When stepping to the right, move the right foot first, followed by the left. Do not cross your feet. When you complete the movement, you are in stance again.
<i>Compas transversal</i>	Transversal Compass	A diagonal step in two directions at once. (A type of Mixed Compass.)	Take a step along an angle. Your feet may sometimes cross. When you complete the movement, you are in stance again.
<i>Compas Curvo</i>	Curved Compass	A curved step to one side or the other away from the opponent along the circle. (A type of Mixed Compass.)	When stepping to the left, move the left foot first, followed by the right. When stepping to the right, move the right foot first, followed by the left. Do not cross your feet. When you complete the movement, you are in stance again.

Conclusion

We have worked from the foundation techniques to advanced footwork that is used in special circumstances. If you know the terms shown above, you can take an original Spanish sword text and unlock the footwork. The ultimate goal of anyone reading this material is to seek material directly from the plume of Carranza, Pacheco, and the other Spanish masters.

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Translator’s Note

All Spanish translations within this article are the work of Mary Dill Curtis from facsimiles of the original Spanish source texts.