

# The Footwork of Di Grassi

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*\*This article is a revision of an earlier article that I wrote in 2006.*

Di Grassi believed that fencing was more firmly rooted in footwork than in anything else. It was necessary to provide balance and to help a fighter put force behind his blows.

## Stance

In his treatise, Di Grassi recommends that a fighter stand with his body “stable” and turned towards the enemy. A fighter should make himself as small a target as possible and if he must bend his body, he should take care to bend away from the enemy. When a fighter strikes he should either advance or thrust forward as soon as it is to his advantage to do so. You should always carry your body so as to make yourself firm and immovable. Don’t make any unnecessary movements. Don’t skip or leap. Rather keep your feet on the ground and make firm and unwavering movements. Always strike or defend in one or half a motion and be careful to keep foot and arm movements together.

*It is important that a fighter maintain his stability because without stability he is vulnerable not only to attack but also to grappling. He is especially susceptible to being thrown off balance or to the ground by his opponent and in such a position he would be extremely vulnerable to attack and mostly likely unable to defend himself. That’s part of why a fighter shouldn’t skip or leap about. Such action can seriously affect his stability. It’s nearly impossible to have a stable, strong stance when you’re leaping through the air. A fighter should strive not to make any unnecessary movements because they waste time and energy and you may inadvertently place yourself in a disadvantageous position. Di Grassi also touches on a fact that he discusses many times in his work: striking or defending in one or half a motion. It is important to attack and defend in as few motions as possible. Doing so conserves time, motion, and energy. Also, elsewhere in his treatise Di Grassi demonstrates with an illustration how attacking in two times rather than one opens a fighter up to attack from his opponent. Thus it’s especially important to make your attacks and parries in as few movements as possible. Preferably a fighter should be able to attack and defend himself at the same time as this provides the most security against attacks from ones opponent.*

## Movement

When moving your feet you should always take care to “frame a reasonable pace.” If you want to strike you should advance or increase one foot. Conversely, when defending you should retreat or withdraw one foot, taking care not to put yourself off balance or fall.

Di Grassi does not specify what distance is to be considered a reasonable pace. Instead he explains that since all fighters have different body types a given distance, which might be “reasonable”, or comfortable, for one fighter would not be for another fighter. Thus, since everyone’s “reasonable pace” will be different, fighters should take care to figure out the distance that is comfortable for them.

The feet move straight or circularly, forwards or backwards, in a half or a whole pace. A **whole pace** is made when the back foot is carried forwards in front of the front foot without moving the front foot. The whole pace can be made in a **straight pace** or a slope (crooked) pace, however Di Grassi notes that a fighter seldom performs a straight whole pace. In a **slope (crooked) pace** the back foot is still brought in front of the front foot, but this time it is placed at an angle so as to carry the body out of line of the attack. A whole pace can also be made backwards, but usually only as a straight pace. A **half pace** is a transitional movement and is made when the back foot is brought even with the front foot and left there or then moved forwards. When performed backwards, the front foot is moved even with the back foot and left there or from there moved behind the back foot.

A **circular pace** is made when the front or back foot is moved to the right or left in a compass motion. This can also be made as a half or whole circular pace. A whole circular pace is also commonly known as a **volte** and **demi volte** is also another common term for the half circular pace.

*A big benefit of the movements Di Grassi outlines in his treatise is that they not only move the body through a fight but many of them also void the body out of line of attack. This is especially true for the slope and circular paces. A fighter can use these movements to not only secure a more advantageous position from which to launch his attack but he also adds an extra layer of protection to his own body at the same time. This provides a fighter more weapons for his arsenal and additional methods that he can use to both attack and defend himself at the same time, a strategy that Di Grassi advocates over and over again.*

### **The agreement of the hands and feet**

Di Grassi felt very strongly that the strength of the right hand came from the right leg. Similarly the left leg is the strength of the left hand. This theory is known as the agreement of the feet and hands. By this logic, the force of a blow should come from the legs. Because of this, the position of the arms should agree with the position of the legs. For example, if the right leg is behind the body then the fighter should stand so that the right hand is behind the left.

*You can put a lot more force into your attacks by using your legs and hips than you can by using just your arms. Your leg muscles are generally larger and stronger than those of your arm and your hips can generate quite a bit of force just from torque. This additional force would be invaluable if you found yourself on an actual field of battle where life and death truly hung in the balance. In such a situation you need all the additional force and strength for you attacks that you can generate.*

## **Closing thoughts**

A fighter needs a solid foundation in order to be successful and good footwork is a big part of that foundation. Di Grassi understood that and spent several pages of his treatise discussing proper stance and movement. We can learn a great deal from his methods and much of it can benefit not only our fighting but also our own studies of the Arte of Defense. His thoughts on stance and stability are invaluable and have wide applications to both fighting and study. Similarly his thoughts on attacking and defending in time and his use of body voids are especially beneficial to fighters interested in applying their studies in real world combat.

## References

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