



## THE TRI-BLOCK TRAINING DAY

### THE PROBLEM

Because of Hawaii's unique culture and resource constraints, SSG Honolulu relies on Meetup and Facebook to generate new students, rather than offering the SSG's traditional 12-week courses. We end up with a club structure more than a class, which brings certain difficulties. Our students don't break down into neat cohorts who can progress from one structured class to another. Thus, the challenge faced has been to retain our focus on the core curriculum, rather encouraging a fight-club mentality and the dilution of the core material. This is a problem many groups face. After a number of years of experimentation, we have finally developed what seems to be a workable solution to keep all students, from novice zugadore to senior students, on track and bound as a cohesive whole. We call this this "Tri-Block Training Day."

### CONCEPT

Our objectives are to find an anchor class structure that:

- 1) ensures steady progress through the SSG curricula;
- 2) enables the use of multiple teaching approaches to enhance student learning outcomes;
- 3) ensures that senior students continue their progress and
- 4) binds the branch more tightly in the chivalric ethos.

Many HEMA groups do this by emphasizing diversity, by branching out into many different weapons-forms and styles. Some SSG groups do this also, but my training philosophy has long been that the main emphasis should be not on breadth but on core mechanics, tactics and foundational skills. I believe this more rapidly builds fighting skill because the fundamentals impact every aspect of every fight. Within the SSG, most of this material is found in the ellefante, zogho largo and the first integration modules.



*In Block I, using our rotating line or "onion" drill, we are able to focus on fundamentals or intermediate technique and principle*

*In Block II, intermediate and advanced students give instruction to the juniors.*



*SSG Honolulu is a branch of the Schola Saint George, an international "chivalric" school of martial arts, and a Federal 501(c).3 non-profit that teaches about chivalic culture and martial history through training, research, and sponsoring of medieval-style feats of arms. Meet us through Facebook or see our practice schedule on Meetup!*



## OVERVIEW

Our 3- 3 ½ hour training day, on Sundays, is now broken down into three modules.

- **BLOCK 1 – Exercising Principles:** This is not an instructional block but an exercise one. Everyone in the group participates using a rotating “onion” drill format focused on core skills such as using the redoppiando, the rebattendo, kinesthetics of power, finding the point, compound blows, the three volte, and the like. The element to be exercised is chosen according to weaknesses that appear in sparring or in a recent tournament, or just with a kinesthetic review. This block is a coaching block run by the senior instructor or student present, with everyone participating together. This allows new folks to “jump right in,” and they get to see the techniques illustrated by both experienced and novice partners. Sometimes, we insert entry drills into the mix, though this can create equipment difficulties. Sam Fishburne has suggested this begin with footwork or poste exercises, which sounds like a strong addition. Preliminary stretching is advised, too.
- **BLOCK 2 – Fundamental & Intermediate Training:** Following a *short* water break, training assignments are made. Intermediate combatants are paired with students or small groups of students working on the same module (i.e., ellefante, largo, integration). This gives the intermediate and advanced students the opportunity to train others, which builds relationships within the group and reinforces the knowledge element of the curriculum to those teaching. In Block II the emphasis is on the “junior” students. Here is where the “demonstration” and “explanation” and fundamental solo / pair drill work is done.
- **BLOCK III – Intermediate and Advanced Training / Sparring:** After another short water break, focus now shifts to the advanced students. They either work together or under support of the senior instructors to work on integration, stretto or breadth weapons, while the junior students can work on solo or pair drills, breadth weapon, integration, or sparring. The first section of this block can be instruction, but I think it should include significant focused or open sparring. We’re still working on the exact structure for how to work this in, but we’ve been able, since going to the TRI-BLOCK approach, to make sure everyone’s progressing, and we’re seeing results.

## CONCLUSION

In SSG Honolulu we’ve been wrestling with this problem for some time. But in the past six months or so we’ve been working more seriously with the TRI-BLOCK approach to our foundational Sunday practice, and it appears to be paying dividends as core kinesthetics are improving at the same time that our advanced students have time to work on their own material. Training classes, when available, are probably superior but when a club structure is all that is available this format seems to work well.

We believe that a second practice per week, emphasizing more open sparring or integration, will also help, as we discovered in 2013-14, because it fills another weakness, the problem of insufficient “helmet time.”

BRIAN R. PRICE  
Co-Founder, SSG



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