



This cheat sheet is a simple helper for you as an instructor, to run a working and sustainable club. Items should be detailed enough to be of help, but concise enough to fit on two pages. This list is not exhausting nor universally agreed upon, but it is a start.

Is the club consistent and building positive habits?

The experience of students' week to week should be consistent so they know what to expect and can build up helpful habits.

- Be clear what the goal of the club is. Communicate it. Work towards that goal. Having a clear club goal manages student expectations and avoids confusion and discord inside the group.
- Quality of training should be consistent and align with the club goals. Having one great class followed by two bad ones isn't going to make for an overall good environment. Students want something out of the club and if they're only getting it some of the time they will leave. Ideally, quality improves over time.
- Don't just throw new stuff at students. Give them opportunity to practice things they've been shown before so they have a chance of integrating it into their fencing and actually learn to use it.
- Train in a fixed indoor location every week on the same day(s) and time. Don't skip classes unless absolutely necessary. Students should never have to wonder if training is happening or not! Instead attending training should become an easy to follow routine in their lives. Without an indoor location a consistent schedule can't be guaranteed.
- Choose a proper legal framework and collect fees, which are required for loaner gear and an indoor training space. You can run a group without a legal form at first, but then it's easy for the state, ex members or people that take issue with what you do to throw a wrench into your club's affairs. Make it legally difficult to stop you from operating.
- You want to incentivize good behavior so it becomes habit and disincentivize bad behavior in regards to everything from specific exercises, techniques and tactics to group interaction. Students will try to make you happy and get your appraisal, but they will also recognize how other students behave and copy them. Try to make conscious decisions about everything that happens in training.

This will over time form into a clubs culture, which can lead to a culture of excellence or one of excuses. Culture can be hard to change after it has solidified. An inexperienced instructor won't notice many of the things he's incentivizing, so ask experienced instructors.

- Every group has unwritten rules. Think about turning the most important ones into written rules so students know what to expect, especially gear and safety regulations and things to avoid. Written rules have to be enforced.

Are students enjoying themselves and improving?

If students don't enjoy training or feel like they're not improving, they might get frustrated and leave whereas happy students will spread the word about this awesome thing they're doing. It's okay to have hard and demanding training, but it should be fun and rewarding as well.

- Tell students how they've improved over time as they might not realize it themselves. Be specific and do it regularly.
- Check the mood in the room during training. Smiling students are usually good. Students joking with each other before training means people feel comfortable in the group, which is great as well. Bad signs can be more nuanced with students getting silently frustrated or gloomy. Ask them about it if someone behaves out of the ordinary.
- Create occasions where students can socialize and get to know each other on a personal level. Students might spent years training with the group and should be able to build up trust with each other. Asking a group of friends to help each other through the hardships of learning martial arts makes success more reachable than with a group of strangers.
- Exchanging blows and knowledge with outsiders is very enjoyable and valuable as well. You and your students should visit events and organize them as well. Find ways to invite other clubs and get to know them.
- Keep on learning yourself. Being a great instructor is a separate skill than being a great martial artist and it has to be



learned and practiced just like everything else. Having capable instructors is one of a club's greatest assets.

- Ask senior instructors for tips. Best to do it in person. If that's not possible use Phone or Skype. If that's also not possible, ask by E-Mail / Facebook / etc. If you don't have another HEMA club nearby, get in contact with instructors of other martial arts from the area. Great didactics are not limited to a specific martial art.
- Invite experienced instructors over for weekend seminars so your students can experience new material and new angles of view to known material. Ask guest instructors about his impression of the group in general and discuss things you're unsure about.

Are new students visiting for trial training and joining?

Students have to leave for a variety of reasons, so new students are always needed to fill the ranks. Having only a few students attend classes can demotivate the remaining students and lead to a chain reaction, where only one or two people or none at all are showing up. This quickly becomes frustrating for the instructor as well.

- Choose a club name that's easily recognizable and relates to what you do, so interested people will remember you.
- Have a good looking website with up to date information that can be found via Google. Favor an easy to maintain website that looks similar to other websites over a complicated but fancy one. Make contacting the club as easy and straightforward as possible.
- Advertise continuously. Start with cheap and easy, like making Facebook posts in local groups. Continue with cheapish but labor intensive, like doing public demos or putting up posters around town. Only then try something with substantial costs like paid advertisement. Check if your mode of advertising is actually working by asking new students how they found you.
- If your group image is professional enough, contact local media. Send out press kits every time you do something of note. You can try to contact your local media sport person and ask what info he would be interested in.
- If students show up but never join check your first impression as a group (professionalism, friendliness, inviting training space etc.) and if what you advertise yourself as matches what you actually do. Try to build realistic expectations through advertisement and your website, that you can actually match.
- Note: It's seldom your fees or equipment costs that keep people from joining. For one, you can sell cost in a more positive way („*You don't need all the gear from the start, we will lend you stuff*“) and also you don't have aim for low income groups like students. If people love something and cost is reasonable, they find ways to pay for it.

Is there more than one guy (you) doing stuff for the club?

Doing everything alone is not sustainable and relies solely on you not getting ill, going on vacation, getting frustrated or burned out. Find allies. Find help. If you lead by example, people will be ready to lend a hand.

- For organizational duties tell students what needs to be done, why it is important for the club and that you would appreciate some help. Make it clear that volunteers won't have to do it forever and you will help them get started. Most likely someone will gladly help.

Publicly encourage and appreciate any effort volunteers put in, especially if they're doing it for free. Recognize their work. The end goal is to create a team that helps each other out to the best of their ability and availability.
- You will need additional instructors eventually. Look for more senior students with the right character traits. You generally want someone who is friendly, patient, motivated and reliable. If he's lacking skill or training that's not a big issue. Both can be built up with your guidance, but character doesn't change as easily. The best martial artist among the students might not be the best choice as an instructor.

Ask privately if a potential instructor would be willing to help. Don't try to force the answer you want. But, people underestimate their own capabilities and might not feel ready, so you might have to slightly nudge them in the right direction. If they say no you can always try again in a few months.