Timing a Compound Attack, relative to the action(s) of a Defender

Classically**,** the defender should be attempting to parry the attacking blade at the last possible moment. The defender would be expected to parry what s/he believes is a simple attack (not knowing that it's a feint) by using the forte and guard of his/her own blade relative to the foible of the attacking blade. Times however have moved on. Fewer and fewer defenders take classically executed parries, thus frustrating your pupils when they find they cannot deceive their opponent's parry and carry out their compound attacks. So what influences the time available to deceive the parry and hit the opponent?

Analysing the Opponent
To successfully carry out a compound attack, the attacker must first make a number of observations concerning his/her opponent's defence. The most important factors influencing this are the type, size, speed and pattern of parries and the distance between attacker and defender

The Nature of the Parry

Let's first consider the type, size and speed of the parry.

- Type of parry, is it a:
  - simple or lateral parry
  - circular parry
  - semi-circular parry
  - diagonal parry
  - contraction parry (moving in a circular fashion but opposite to the conventional circular parry)
- Size and Speed of parry, is it
  - Small and slow
  - Small and quick
  - Big and slow
  - Big and quick

The Timing of the Parry

Simplistically, having established the type, size and speed of the parry, we now need to consider, when the parry is being taken, relative to the feint. By answering the following might help you better understand when to deceive the parry. Answering the following enables the attacker to know when to deceive the parry:

- Is the parry being taken, at the same time every time?
  - Is it being taken early?
  - Is it being taken late?
  - It is being taken somewhere between early or late, but consistently at the same time?

The Pattern of the Parries

By analysing the pattern of the defenders parries, the attacker is better able to make predictions concerning when the parry is likely to happen:

- Is there a pattern to when the parry occurs, that is, on the first two occasions the defender is attacked s/he parries early, and then on the third occasion parries late?
- Is the defender erratic in the timing of the parry, being sometimes early and sometimes late with no fixed pattern?

Distance

Distance is also a major influencing factor in determining the success of a compound attack. The attacker may be close enough to hit without the need for a foot action (i.e. a step or a lunge etc.) On the other hand, the distance might be such that the attacker may require a step or a lunge etc. in order to deliver the attack. As I'm sure you will be aware, distance is not necessarily fixed. From the attacker's perspective, the ideal must be for the defender not increase or decrease the distance during the execution of the attack (i.e. for the defender to remain stationary). It the defender moves forward during the course of the attack, then this will severely reduce the time available to deceive the parry and hit. If the defender moves back during the course of the attack then this will increase the time available for the defender to parry and mean that the attacker must change the line to be hit and/or accelerate the final hitting action.

Executing the Compound Attack

Having now analysed the opponent's defence, let us now consider the type, size, and speed of the attacker's actions

Presentation of the Feint

- If the feint is presented close to the defenders blade, then there will be less time to deceive the parry
- If the feint is presented in the opposite line to that adopted by the defender, then the feint
    - may not be immediately recognised as a threat
    - may cause the defender's action to be larger than normal and may also cause some shifting of the target

Depth of the Feint

The depth of the feint plays a significant part if determining when the defender reacts. If the defender responds to shallow feints, then once his/her parry has been deceived, the attacker, in order to be successful, may need to accelerate the hitting action. If the defender responds only to deep feints, then once the parry has been deceived, there will only be a small amount of time available to score the hit.

Target Area threaten by the Feint and to be hit

Where the feint is directed relative to with the hit is to be direct, is also significant relative to the timing of the attack, that is:

- both the feint and the hit may be delivered into the same area of target
- the feint may be directed to one area of target, whilst the hit may be directed to a completely different area of target.

Other Influencing Factors which may Determine the Success of the Attack:

- The defender may be attempting to parry the perceived simple attack at just the right time, with the minimum of blade movement
- The defender may have perceived the attackers first blade action to be a feint and is therefore readying him/herself to attempt to parry the final action of what s/he perceive to be a compound attack (i.e. take successive parries, see *Distance* above)
- The target may move during the execution of the attack (i.e. the defender may attempt to duck, jump up or twist the body out of the path or the point.
- Speed of reaction and speed of action of the defender

Summary.

The attacker can significantly improve his/her chances of hitting by simply knowing, when the defender parries and the direction and speed of the defender's parry. The coach's job however is slightly more complex in that they are required to reproduce a variety of conditions under which the fencer can practise the timing of a compound attack relative the action(s) of the defender. Alternative the attacker could simply, stick his/her arm out, follow the point and hope for the best, not particularly uncommon and not very successful!