

WELCOME TO “BEGINNERS GUIDE TO THE MARTIAL ARTS”

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Sensei Paul Fox*

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Types of Martial Arts

When you finally decide to work on your lifetime dream to become a proficient martial artist you must first find a style that best suits your needs interests and body type. The choices are vast and include many martial styles from almost every country in the world. Some of the more popular styles originate in Japan, China, Korea, India and many more.



Jigoro Kano
Founder of
Judo

Further you must decide if you are interested in the martial arts for tournament competition, self defense or physical and mental development. Each style has its own unique way to look at the martial arts and it will emphasize its own version of strikes, grappling, throws, joint locks, forms, sparing or any combination of the above. The varied emphasis will provide advantages and weaknesses for each system and style. As a novice it is difficult to determine what will meet their needs and at times all this is somewhat overwhelming and its difficult to get going.



Gichin Funakoshi
father of modern day
Karate

First, I recommend you check out what is close to where you live. If you are training two or three times per week you don't want to spend all your time in the car going to the club (more about this in a moment).

Have a quick look through the yellow pages and see what is being offered in your area. Once you know what is available in your area it is time for you to do a little more research into the styles. Go to your local library or search on the web with Google and see if you can find more specific information on the system or styles in your area.

Can you find a web page, is their any history that that would indicate it is a traditional form or is it a local invention. When you have something that fits your interest it is time to make some contact with the local clubs.

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Find a local school

With your list of schools in hand it is now time to make a few calls to the local clubs. You may want to make a check list of specific information.

- ✓ Who are the instructors are they black belts or do senior students teach the classes.
- ✓ How often are the classes, is their free practice time also available
- ✓ Is it a mixed class environment male\
female\
young\
old
- ✓ Can you come and view a class
- ✓ Can you come and participate in a beginner class
- ✓ Are they offering a private lesson ??? Don't be fooled its not really a lesson but a sales pitch. That's ok You will still get lots of good information about the school and they style by attending a "FREE Private Lesson" just know what your are getting into
- ✓ Has the school been in operation for a few weeks or 20 years
- ✓ How long have the instructors been training? What ranks do they hold?
- ✓ Do you have to sign a contract to train or can you pay month at a time. Most schools will allow you to join for a year and pay by the month but they will often offer discounts if you pay for a full year up front.



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Now its time to visit a few schools

When you visit the school a few things to look for:

- ✓ Is their parking close to the club ?
- ✓ Is it expensive parking ?
- ✓ Are their change rooms and lockers?
Do they cost extra to use.
- ✓ Is the club clean and well illuminated?
- ✓ Is their sufficient fresh air in the club? You will be aware of this if you are able to observe a class.
- ✓ Do you think you will be able to build some sort of positive connection with the instructors? Remember you will be training for many years with this group, are they the kind of people you want to hang around for extended periods of time?
- ✓ What does your gut feel tell you? Do you see lots of ego and bravado in the club that will hinder a safe supportive learning environment?



When looking for a school be aware that there are some schools that are strictly in business to make money. They have a superficial curriculum at best and their job is to drive as many students into the beginner classes as they can knowing full well that a percentage will stay on to each successive belt level. The secret to their success is slick advertising and forceful sales tactics. Students only stay as long as they are forced to by the contract they have signed and some are so disappointed the stop going even though they are still paying. DON'T let this happen to you ask questions and follow your gut feelings.

There are also schools that are dedicated to the pursuit of high quality training and learning for all students and instructors. YES, you still have to pay for this type of school but often it may be less or just enough to pay for the facility being used and enough to honor the instructors time and efforts. Often these schools are run by teachers that just love what they do and want to share it. These schools are often characterized by smaller numbers of students but they will stay longer.

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And clearly there will be schools that fall in the zone between the two examples.

Be aware, ask questions, don't take any mysterious and mystical martial arts answers like “ **that is part of our secret teachings** “ or those special techniques are only available to the “**Black Belt Member Club**” (**by the way that cost \$50/month extra**).

Overall do you observe students being treated with respect? Are the students respectful of the instructor?

Does this school “feel” right for you?

Now !!! ----- Good luck and get going !!!!!!!

Your first few days or weeks of training:

It's natural to feel nervous for your first few classes. You are entering a world that is likely very different from your normal day to day work environment. A quality school will provide a clean safe environment that encourages each student to press their own personal boundaries and limits. SO get ready to be pushed and nudged toward your maximum potential. Each school has their own special way of doing this so open up and go for it.

This is naturally different than public humiliation and debasement ... YOU BE THE JUDGE its your experience.



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The Class Structure:

Most schools have a formal or semiformal way to initiate the beginning and end of each class. Many classes begin with a line of students facing the instructor. The line is usually organized by belt level or rank. Once the students are in place they will recite a student credo or do a short meditation or some other type of recognized and repeatable procedure.

Following the initiation of the class it will often move to a series of warm up and strengthening exercises. This part of the class is often led by the head instructor or one of the senior students. The goal in this area of class is to strengthen joints and muscles, increase flexibility, increase your balance and stamina.

After the warm up exercises the class will often be divided up into smaller groups. Each group will then be given a training drill to perform. The drill types may include striking techniques, joint locks, throws or whatever the instructor feels is appropriate at the time. The groups may be given several related training assignments throughout the class. You may work on partner activities, full group activities or individual training drills.

Keep in mind you will only get out of your training what you put in !!!! You may have the best teacher in the world but if you don't apply yourself 120% every minute of every class you will fall short of your potential. SO work hard.

The class will often end with a warm down. This is just a way of slowing down your metabolism and stretching out your joints and muscles so you won't be stiff and sore the next day. (By the way new students are often more stiff and sore the second day after the workout so remember to stretch each day at home more on that later)

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Partner Training

Most schools include partner training of some type. You may be sparring with a partner or practicing a form or self defense technique but the key is you are working one on one with another person.

It is always important to remember that your partner is a mirror of your experience and should always be treated with the utmost respect at all times.

When working with a partner you want someone who is:

- ✓ Focused on the task at hand
- ✓ Does not get caught up in idle talk.
- ✓ Trains very hard
- ✓ Respects your level of ability and works within those limits
- ✓ Is sensitive to your physical and mental exhaustion level
- ✓ Is interested in you getting the most out of your training today



If this is what you want from a partner then first you must be all of these things and more !!!

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Solo Training



The effective use of solo training often provides the difference between an average student and a serious student that is beginning to excel. Solo training requires personal commitment especially in class when the teacher is not watching or when you are training alone at home.

Solo training can be the vehicle that provides the extra repetitions of a technique that help to ingrain it into your **“muscle memory”**

Solo training can give you the edge on your speed, timing, flexibility, mental training, visualization and more. Don't sell yourself short be serious about your solo training at home and in the Dojo (training hall).

There are many things that can be done at home or in the club as solo assignments. Working on rolls, falls, flexibility, striking a heavy bag, striking a speed bag, wind sprints, working in front of a mirror to observe technical form, observing video tapes of your personal training, extended outside runs through the neighborhood, speed walking and on and on.

One of my personal favorites is the video tape of my personal training. This can be fun and educational. Set up a camera on a tripod and just let it run for the whole class. Take it home and view it on your own using a compassionate but critical eye.

You will be amazed at what you see. “ But Sensei my back is straight, my knees are bent, I am in total balance” check the video and you be the judge. Remember it is about learning and getting better lose your ego and move on.

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