

A comprehensive guide on many different aspects of martial arts pedagogy. Topics include: teaching children with learning disabilities, anatomy and common injuries, leadership skills, and hundreds of specific drills.

Teaching Martial Arts: A Practical Guide

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Teaching Martial Arts

A Practical Guide

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This book is intended to provide only general information about key concepts and theories related to the instruction of martial arts. No part of it should be construed as offering any legal, medical, or professional advice. The reader assumes all risk of injury, lawsuit, or other loss resulting from the use of any part of this book. Consult a physician before beginning any exercise program. Consult with relevant professionals who are skilled in the legal systems of your locality before making any changes to your martial arts program.

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Basic Lessons

About This Book and How to Use It.....	xi
Lesson 1: Student/Teacher Relationship.....	1
Lesson 2: Fundamental Concepts and Leadership Skills.....	4
Lesson 3: Ten Influential Martial Artists.....	10
Lesson 4: Communication Skills	16
Lesson 5: Learning Styles	18
Lesson 6: Personality Types	20
Lesson 7: Teaching Techniques	23
Lesson 8: General Training Effects	30
Lesson 9: The Ideal Class	32
Lesson 10: Student Retention	34
Lesson 11: Safety First.....	40
Lesson 12: Warm-ups	42
Lesson 13: Basics and Traditional Techniques.....	45
Lesson 14: Paddle Drills	48
Lesson 15: Partner Drills.....	50
Lesson 16: Promotion Tests.....	53
Lesson 17: One Step Sparring.....	54
Lesson 18: Teaching Forms	56
Lesson 19: Teaching Sport Combat (Grappling and Sparring).....	59
Lesson 20: Teaching Combat.....	66
Lesson 21: Teaching Non-Physical Requirements	68
Lesson 22: Classroom Management	71
Lesson 23: Games	73
Lesson 24: Special Students.....	81
Lesson 25: Discipline and Punishment	85
Lesson 26: Legal Issues	90

Pottle and Hoffman

Lesson 27: Parents	94
Lesson 28: Body Planes and Motions	97
Lesson 29: Physiology of Training	100
Lesson 30: Foot and Ankle	103
Lesson 31: Shin and Knee	106
Lesson 32: Hip	110
Lesson 33: Core	112
Lesson 34: Spine	115
Lesson 35: Shoulder	118
Lesson 36: Hand and Arm	120
Lesson 37: The Eye	123
Lesson 38: The Ear	126
Lesson 39: Nervous System	130
Lesson 40: Immune System	133
Lesson 41: Muscle System	137
Lesson 42: Combining Forms	140
Lesson 43: Curriculum Design	151
Lesson 44: Basic Business Concepts	153
Lesson 45: Coaching at Tournaments	155
Lesson 46: Basic Physics of Martial Arts	157
Class Planning Worksheet	164
Class Report	165
The Misadventures of Master Malo: Class	166
Master Malo and The Promotion Test	168
Master Malo Goes to the Tournament	171
Sample Certification Requirements	176
References	178

Lesson 10: Student Retention

Student retention is one of the most important things in having a good school. Without retention, you will never have a high number of students. Also, without retention, you will never get the critical high belt helpers to make your life easier. In order to get high retention, you first need to know why students might quit:

Note, that often what matters is not the actual situation, but what the student perceives the situation to be. If you care about a student, but don't show it, they may get the idea that you don't care.

- **“Good Enough Training”** – If you are always just going to the bare minimum and never really trying to improve, the students may leave.
- **Unfair or Disrespectful Treatment of Students/Uneven Application of Discipline** – Don't have a “teachers' pet” because all those students who are not your favorites may leave. It's good to have standard punishments, or tiered ones based on age or belt level. For instance, if all black belts who forget their belt have to do 50 pushups, there isn't a problem. However, if some students have to do it and others don't, then you have a problem.
- **Lack/Perceived Lack of Knowledge of Instructor** – If in the bottom of his heart, the student doesn't think that you can make him better, then he is not likely to stay.
- **Personality Clash** – Sometimes, you will just not get along with certain students, or more likely their parents. You should take steps at first to resolve the differences. Try to ignore things, see things from their perspective, etc. However, if after all this, you still don't get along with them, it's best to let them go. One problem student can cause an incredible amount of damage in your school. This will usually be with the instructor, but it could also be a class of two students or two parents. Try to have them in separate classes, or sit down together to talk about it.

Teaching Martial Arts

- **Failure to Follow Through on Promises** – If you always say you'll help a student, or if you promise to teach the children discipline, then you have to do that. If you don't, then students will lose trust in you and may quit.
- **No Sense of Progress** – If the student spends time and money in training, but doesn't feel like they are getting better, they are not likely to stay. At first, remind them of the progress vs. time graph (found in the KAT handbook) and let them know that the higher they get, the harder it is to progress. Also, usually in the middle belts, students may get unmotivated. Let them know that this is normal, and now is the time that they will learn to follow through on commitments.
- **Not Seeing the Benefits** – Of course, the benefits of martial arts come over time. However, sometimes, a situation can develop where people believe that the training will not help get them the benefits it should. For example, if the instructor is overly-critical, coming to class might be a source of stress rather than a release. You will lose students this way.
- **Injury/Fear of Injury** – These injuries could be from Taekwondo or from outside activities. Also, if someone thinks that they will get hurt, they will be less likely to do those activities. This usually comes up in relation to sparring. To help them avoid fear of injury, make sure that they are doing drills appropriate to their age/skill level/injury. I.e., don't make someone with bad knees do plyometrics.
- **Burnout** – This often goes along with injury. Students sometimes get so excited, that they train a lot. Sometimes, this causes them to put other areas of their life on hold, and then when they get behind in them, they drop out of TKD. Avoid burnout by limiting the training of younger students. Also, make sure all students balance hard training with fun activities and also periods of rest.
- **No Goals** – If the student does not know where they want to go with their training, they will be less likely to remain excited. Set goals together. The belt system provides perfect feedback and a set of goals.

Keep setting goals even for those students who are already black belts.

- **Change in Policy/Schedule** – Sometimes, you will need to change the curriculum or schedule. Unfortunately, in a large school, there will be a few people who do not like the new way. Also, many people are naturally resistant to change.
- **Class/Student Mismatch** – This is not usually a problem at KAT, because of the large numbers of classes and flexibility of our schedule. However, sometimes someone is in a class that is too easy or too hard for him. He may become either bored or frustrated. Also, this includes having beginning students spar too soon, especially without proper instruction (i.e., have a “Sparring 101” class).
- **Getting Out of the Routine** – This is often the case when students who seemed to love everything about class suddenly stop coming. It’s not that they don’t want to be there, but once they stop training for a month or so, they feel almost like they’re no longer part of the class or that everyone is ahead of them. They’re often high belts who have forgotten their form, maybe after an illness, tough semester, or extended vacation. Now, they feel like they’ll embarrass themselves and the school if they come back. Encourage them to start slowly.
- **Moving** – Oftentimes, students will move away and be unable to continue training. Always keep them in contact with the school via emails and newsletters. Also, help them to find a school in their new home. Often, they will still refer people from their old home to join the school.
- **Financial Difficulties** – Sometimes, due to a career change or life event, students may no longer be able to afford training.
- **“Not for them.”** – I include this last one because it is often a reason why students may take a free trial or a 6 week beginner program but not continue. However, due to the amazing number of benefits of martial arts, this one is usually more a case of you, as the instructor, not getting them to understand all of the benefits that they could

Teaching Martial Arts

achieve. Still, sometimes people are at a point in their lives where they do not choose to engage in healthy behaviors, and often nothing can be done to deter them.

In a nationwide research study conducted by **Gary Gabelhouse** for Fairfield Research, they found that of everyone in America who had trained in Taekwondo at one time, 86% had quit. These are the reasons that they came up with.

Reason Why Quit	% of Quitters
Personal & Job Time Constraints	31%
Moved Away From School	23%
Just Lost Interest	18%
Injury/Medical Problem	13%
Classes Ran Their Term	8%
Finances/Cost of Classes	7%

It is interesting to note that over half (54%) of the people quit for reasons that had nothing to do with the quality of the school. However, if you make the school an inseparable part of the students' lives, they will stay. At KAT, we've had students not move or put off moving out of town just because of the school.

Always assume that you can stop a particular student from quitting. It's not true, but by thinking that way, you will end up stopping many that you thought you could not stop. It always hurts to have your students leave, especially in the beginning. But you have to know that everyone, even great teachers, lose many students. Bruce Lee probably lost hundreds of students in the few years he was teaching. I'm sure Helio Gracie has lost thousands, or even tens of thousands, in the decades that he's been teaching.

On a final note on students quitting, it is important to note that the more proactive you are, the better. If you notice signs that a student is veering off course and correct them immediately, they will be less likely to develop into a full fledged reason to quit. For instance, if you notice that a student is heading for burnout, order him to take a few classes off. If someone has misses several

tests and is not quite ready for the next one, offer a free private lesson or two. If you changed the schedule and then noticed some people not coming, sit down with them and plan out a good training regimen. If someone has an injury, explain to them how to still train around it. Doing little things like this ahead of time is the best way to stop people from quitting. The most important thing is to start emailing or contacting students when they start missing classes. It's probably innocuous, but there might be a problem. Sometimes you will have to talk for a while to get to the root of the issue, but usually you will get there and then know what to do to resolve it.

Why Students Stay

Students will stay if the program has good quality and value and they see their own progress. What things contribute to making them want to stay?

Excellent Value – The classes shouldn't be too expensive, and the students should always feel like they're getting more than their money's worth. They should feel like they're 'cheating' us, i.e., getting more out of the training than the money they're putting in.

Challenging Curriculum – The material that you teach and how they advance through the belts is incredibly important. This is usually set by the school, and not the individual instructors. If they need to work hard to succeed, but are not overwhelmed, this is the ideal situation. The curriculum must be easy enough for white belts but not bore the black belts.

Focus on Black Belt – For color belts, having the focus on getting a black belt and knowing that they can achieve it are very important. For black belts, different goals are necessary.

A Sense of Progress – Students who know that they're getting better will not want to leave.

School Community – This is especially important for middle school age children and adults. If the school is where all their friends are, they are not going to leave. The need for a community is a fundamental part of human nature that is mostly unsatisfied in modern life. Students also feel a

Teaching Martial Arts

responsibility to their junior ranks, and a debt of gratitude to their senior ranks.

Motivating Instructor – Sometimes students will keep training because of the instructor and how he or she motivates them. For instance, when one student is having a problem, you could magnify that problem and show how he could overcome it. For example, if the student was tired from a bad night's sleep, you might say something like *"I know that you could not sleep for a week, and still work harder than most of the other students in class!"* This will motivate him and reframe his problem into not being so bad.

Lesson 38: The Ear

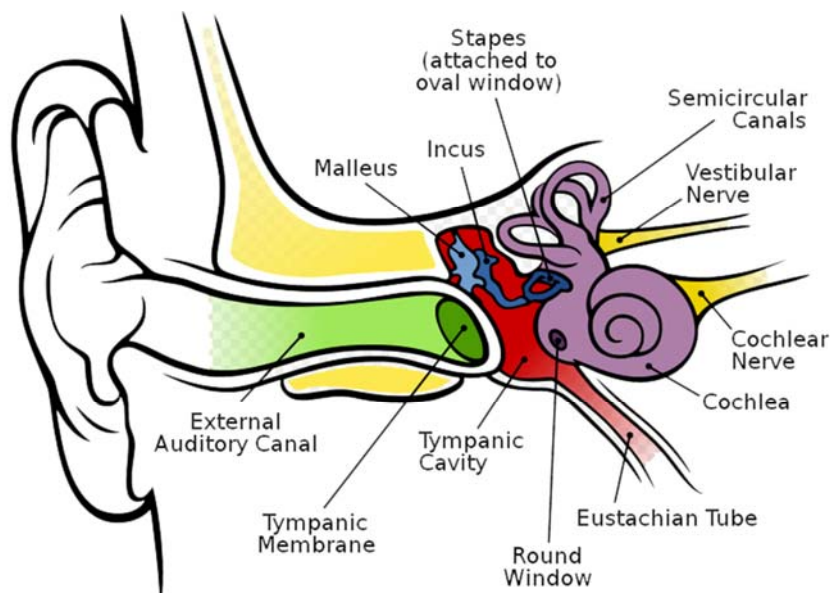


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The ear is a very important organ in the body that has two key functions. The first, of course, is hearing. The ear transfers sound wave energy into nerve impulse energy. First, the outer ear catches and slightly amplifies the sound as it narrows. The eardrum acts like a drum that causes the **malleus**, **incus**, and **stapes** bones to vibrate along the same patterns. The stapes pushes on fluid in the **cochlea**, which transfers these fluctuating fluid waves to waves of tiny hairs in the **organ of corti**. The signals travel along the **vestibular cochlear nerve** and to the brain where they are processed. The second function of the ear is balance.

A defect in the eardrum or three inner ear bones is serious, but can be overcome by something called a **cochlear implant**. This is a microphone that connects directly to the cochlea and transfers the sound it hears to pulses which can be understood by the wearer's brain.

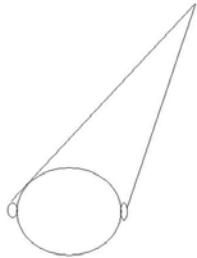
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Decibel level - Sound is measured in decibels. The key thing to remember about the decibel level is that it is a logarithmic scale. Thus, 20 decibels is twice as loud as 10, and 30 decibels is 4 times (not 3) as loud as 10. 40 decibels is 8 times as loud as 10. Every time the decibel level increases by 10, the sound intensity doubles. Here are some decibel levels for common sounds.

Weakest sound heard	0 dB
Whisper Quiet Library	30 dB
Normal conversation (3-5')	60-70 dB
Truck Traffic	90 dB
Loud Rock Concert	115 dB
Pain	125 dB
Loudest recommended exposure (with protection) and gun blast	140 dB

It is important to note that there are generally three things that determine how much hearing damage there is— the intensity of the sound, the duration of the sound, and the background noise. The last one is interesting, and can be seen in cases of Eskimos with hearing loss. There was a famous study that found many Eskimos going deaf from their hunting guns, while the same didn't happen to soldiers or people who were witnesses to shootings. The reason is that when the background noise is loud or at least prevalent, muscles in your middle ear clamp down on the three bones to cause them to vibrate less for a given decibel level, thus muffling the sound. They do this so that the sound waves aren't so strong that they damage the ear. So what happened to the Eskimos? Alone in the frozen tundra, their ears were fine tuned to pick up the most minute sounds. When they shot their guns, their ears were not damped at all, causing damage. By the way, ears aren't the only things that sound can damage. If you happen to be near a really loud sound (over 200 dB), you could be in trouble. For instance, people on a nearby island when the volcano Krakatoa exploded were killed when the sound waves hit their chests. Other people 3000 miles away heard the explosion.

Sound Localization: So what benefit does having two ears have, and why are they on the opposite sides of our head? The answer has to do with figuring out where a sound is coming from. As you can see from the drawing below (The large circle is a head with two ears, the small circle is the location of the sound, and the lines are the path the sound takes to get to the ear) if we know



trigonometry, and the different times the signal gets to the brain, we can calculate where the sound came from. That's exactly the calculation your brain does. This is a critical skill when facing multiple opponents.



Cauliflower Ear – Cauliflower ear is a common ailment in wrestlers and grapplers, and can be prevented by simply wearing special grappling headgear. Basically, the cartilage separates from the perichondrium after a blow or other trauma to the ear. This causes a bruise to form. At this point, a doctor can treat the injury. However, when the injury is left and never treated, a permanent scarring can form.

It's generally not necessary to wear head protection for grappling intermittently, but serious grapplers should invest in ear protection. Cauliflower ear can also occur from sparring, but helmets should always

be worn in Taekwondo sparring.

Ears and Balance: You might have noticed that the semicircular canals in the ear anatomy diagram in the beginning of this lesson look like the XYZ 3 dimensional graph axes, and you'd be absolutely correct. These fluid-filled canals also have hair cells that detect the movement of the fluid. Because of their shape, they can detect angular rotation in all 3 dimensions. The **sacculus** and the **uticle** are in the middle, and they detect movement in a straight line, for instance going forward or stopping. Balance is critically important in martial arts. Problems in these areas can cause a student to lose balance. By training, we learn to compensate for any errors our body makes and we also learn to understand the signals from these organs better. Be wary of kicks to the head, aside from causing concussions, they can also cause temporary loss

Teaching Martial Arts

of balance. As students get older, these hair cells die. So, just as older people lose their ability to hear, they also lose the ability to balance at a similar rate.

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