THE PATH OF PROTECTION

Improving Self-Defense Training in the Martial Arts

An Honors Thesis
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Abstract/Preface

This work encompasses both a written treatise and the Path of Protection technique compilation project. The project is an electronic, searchable database of self-defense techniques with pictures and descriptions. It has been designed to be easily used as part of the self-defense training of a student of the martial arts, law enforcement agents, security employees, or military personnel. It also contains supplementary material to aid in self-defense instruction and training. The treatise was written to detail proper methods of self-defense training and how the technique compilation should be used. The work discusses cutting edge research on self-defense training and its influences on the martial arts. It also identifies multiple problems in the typical methods of self-defense training and reasonable solutions for them.

This work grew out of a Ball State Martial Arts Club project originally meant as a way of supplementing the class teachings. The idea was, and remains, that a student would peruse the pictures of techniques, identify those that would work best for him or her, choose two or three that he or she liked from those, and memorize the individual moves. Then, the student would bring the techniques to an advanced martial artist to learn the subtle intricacies and to use the technique effectively. With this help the student would begin practicing the technique over and over with partners in many ways under the supervision of an instructor. As will be discussed, this remains the most effective way of using the techniques organized here.

With this project, beyond the points therein, I hope to convey that the martial arts are a subject worthy of academic consideration. In fact, it is one of the few subjects that combines such a multitude of sciences. Psychology, physiology, history, biology, kinesthetics and kinesthesiology, parapsychology, educational theory, and philosophy are all part of the study of the martial arts. It is not, as some might believe, simply sport or exercise. It is not meant merely for warriors, but for warrior scholars. The academic study of the martial arts has been part of their practice throughout their history. It continues today in works like this one.

Due to time constraints on the project, I will be unable to devote much attention to or collected techniques for all types of self-defense, such as defenses against weapons. However, it is my hope that the technique collection will continue to grow in the future.
Disclaimer

This is not a manual on complete self-defense. This is a discussion of how to train to physically defend oneself. There are extremely important issues beyond the physical aspects of actual combat, such as understanding how to avoid conflict, the weighty topics of when a person should defend himself, and whether a person will even have the proper attitude to try. Discussions of these issues would fill volumes. Therefore, there are certain areas that I will not be able to devote attention to in this discussion.

First, I will be unable to discuss how to avoid self-defense situations in the first place. This is the most important part of self-defense knowledge and if learned and practiced properly will greatly lessen your chances of ever needing to use the knowledge and techniques in this project. I will also be unable to discuss victim psychology, religious and cultural views impeding self-defense, or the pressures society puts on individuals (mainly women) to not resist or report attack, acquaintance rape, or sexual abuse. I strongly urge you to seek out a licensed self-defense or martial arts instructor who spends significant time on avoiding conflict, building self-confidence, and assuring students of their rights and instilling in them the proper attitude to defend themselves and report any attack or unwanted sexual contact. If you are a woman, I urge you to find a school that has classes specifically for you and that covers the societal and moral issues impacting your gender. Even if you are currently a martial artist or taking martial arts classes, your training and the knowledge presented here may not protect you if there are other, less concrete issues standing in the way of your defending yourself.

I will not be discussing or presenting techniques for children's self-defense or self-defense for the physically or mentally handicapped. These are areas that require very different teaching methods and they deserve their own bodies of work in order to fully address them.

Most importantly, nothing presented in this work is meant as a replacement for complete martial arts training. Nor can the techniques presented be learned without the help of a martial artist who is familiar with them or who is advanced enough to understand their components. You cannot learn to defend yourself by practicing techniques alone. You must develop attributes that are solely the focus of martial arts training. You cannot learn a martial art with a book and a friend or from video-recorded lessons. And, although I advocate self-defense classes above for the purposes of dealing with societal issues and learning conflict avoidance, several month long classes meeting once or twice a week cannot instill the physical reflexes and knowledge necessary to survive combat. No one should attempt to learn and practice the techniques presented herein except in supplement to proper martial arts training and with the supervision and aid of an experienced martial arts or combat instructor.

Grammatical notes:
The masculine and feminine pronouns will be used in alternating fashion from now on throughout the text. Both he and she will be meant to refer to a person of either sex unless otherwise indicated.
Looking Down the Path of Protection: an Introduction

There are many reasons for practicing the martial arts; spiritual development, physical fitness, building grace and coordination, fun and competition. But, throughout the long and varied history of all martial arts, one reason has remained primary; learning to defend oneself and survive in combat. After all, those other benefits can be gained from many other practices (dance, yoga, mediation, sports) but the martial arts is so called because it involves the "martial;" fighting, combat, and self-defense. Regardless of whatever martial arts style we might speak of, it has been labeled a martial art because it teaches its trainees how to survive or deflect attack. This does not invalidate the other reasons for taking up the martial arts. Instead, they fulfill the "art" half of the title. But, should you take away or lessen the self-defense and combative aspect of the art, it becomes something else entirely.

The reasons one would want to learn to defend oneself are obvious. Beyond the ability to protect yourself and those around you, self-defense training offers a sense of confidence, a practical understanding of the realities of violence, and the knowledge of how to avoid conflict. For those who choose not to learn to defend themselves for whatever reasons, I have nothing to say. I will not quote rape and assault statistics or horror stories, those are readily available on the internet and in the news. In time, however, those who scorn training as useless or violent may come to understand the importance of learning to defend themselves (I only hope it is not through the hard way) as well as the other, less obvious benefits they are missing.

For those who have already decided to take up self-defense, or have been practicing for a long time, especially in the form of martial arts training, this work is for you. As you become more familiar with self-defense, and hopefully as soon as you begin your training, you will learn that there is much more to self-defense than merely learning to use your body as a weapon. Please be aware that the practical knowledge of personal rights, methods of conflict avoidance, etcetera, and discussions that enable you to realize and come to terms with what your own reactions to assault or harassment would be are the most important parts of self-defense. These teachings can allow you to avoid 99% of trouble, so learn them first. But of all of the important aspects of defending yourself, the one that the martial arts have always centered upon most, and the one that is sadly neglected or poorly taught today, is the physical portion. While true self-defense training involves knowledge and soul-searching, when events are no longer in your control, when it is too late and knowledge and avoidance have flown out the window, it is the skills and reactions of physical self-defense that will save you. That is what this work addresses: the proper methods of training for physical self-defense, based on the research and experiences of combat-experienced martial artists, law-enforcement officers, and soldiers. It will discuss the problems in self-defense training today and how to fix them. Even though, of all the components of martial arts training the physical skill is the part you'll least likely need to know, it is the portion that requires the most time, effort, and specialized methods. Fortunately, throughout the history of humanity the martial arts have existed to aid you in that training. Unfortunately, as you will see, all is not well with self-defense in the martial arts today.
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Part One

The Path Overgrown: The Problems with Current Methods of Self-Defense Training

“In reality many martial artists are not self-defense or unarmed combat experts and many common martial arts combative methodologies are questionable at best and often very dangerous.”

- Robert Redenbach, “Have Martial Artists Corrupted Defensive Tactics Training?”

There is a problem today in the martial arts. The one training that they are supposed to be most able to provide - self-defense - is being taught so poorly in many schools and dojos that it is completely worthless. Of course, many schools, particularly the very traditional or the more modern combatives schools for law enforcement and the military, are training properly. In my own experience, the poor training methods I’m about to describe occur mainly in commercial or sport-art schools that claim to be training in self-defense. Unfortunately, these types of dojos are quickly becoming the majority. Competition, trophies, and quickly earned belts make certain types of schools more lucrative than actual self-defense training. Thus, in too many schools, teachers with no combat experience or understanding are teaching students self-defense methods that are ineffectual and will make the student even more likely to get injured or even killed. If you think this sounds extreme, see if this sounds familiar (or, if you have no experience, visit your local commercial dojo – you know, the one down the street with the big ribbons and trophies in the front window). As an experienced martial artist, I’ve seen this far too often...

The Wrong Path: How not to teach self-defense

“The survival skills instructor has an ethical and legal responsibility to provide his students with the best training possible.”

- Bruce Siddle, Sharpening the Warrior’s Edge

You’ve been training in a martial art for some months now. One night you come into class for what you’ve been told will be a night of self-defense training. You start off class with some warm-up exercises as usual and then your instructor has a student throw an attack at him, which he quickly and easily defends against. Then you’re shown how perform the same defense (probably a wrist lock) in several steps, which you’re allowed to practice five or six times. Then you’re shown a couple different defenses for the same attack. Again you practice them with a partner five or six times each. Throughout the hour or so that your class lasts, you’re shown four or five attacks that you’re particular style is familiar with and several defenses for each. Within the next year or so, you learn many new techniques for the same and new attacks, but you practice few of them more than one night, and never more than one night a month. As you advance in belt ranking you may see these techniques being taught again or be responsible for showing them to younger students, but you may never train in some of those movements again. When you
do have "self-defense nights" again, the training is seldom consistent in techniques or schedule. You may even be told to practice all the techniques at home, but no time is made for you to actually practice techniques frequently with a partner.

Unfortunately, this training method is becoming quite common. While training at these types of schools may offer a range of other benefits, and students there may have other reasons for training, all of these goals can be met through the other practices of the martial arts (sparring, kata, breaking, etc.). The goal of self-defense training is for you to actually be able to defend yourself. If the instructor is going to teach self-defense, she needs to be teaching it properly. When students are told they are learning to defend themselves but are given poor training, they are being lied to and endangered. Most instructors aren’t out to make an easy dollar at your expense, however. The problem is that many instructors believe this type of training is sufficient. After all, since you’ve been shown several techniques and worked through them a couple of times, you now have several to choose from during an attack and you can quickly decide which one works best for the situation. And since you’ve practiced them a few times, you understand how they work and can perform them during an actual attack, right? Wrong. Unfortunately for you and your fellow students, you’ve been training in a way that has very little similarity to actual combat and shows a complete lack of understanding for what actually occurs during a self-defense situation.

Walking a Strange Road: The mind and body in combat

“As the firefighter understands fire, the warrior must understand combat”

- Lt. Col Dave Grossman, On Combat

Facing another person who is trying to maim, rape, or kill you is an extreme and extremely frightening situation. The possible end results are terrifying, the attack is sudden and startling, and your mind is actually preprogrammed to be afraid of conflict. Around 98 percent of people have a phobia of and irrationally react to violent aggression (Grossman 3). What this means for you is that, during an actual attack, you will be extremely stressed both mentally and physically.

As a result of this extreme stress your mind and body will respond with incredible speed with powerful yet contradictory reactions. The sympathetic nervous system, that part of you which reacts to stimulus and activates your excitatory hormones and emotions, becomes highly active and stimulates a response known to all higher animals (Weiten 65). This is known as the fight-or-flight response in psychology and it comes with a whole grab-bag of physical and mental responses.

“When the fight or flight response is evoked, it brings into play the sympathetic nervous system, which is part of the autonomous, or involuntary nervous system. The sympathetic nervous system acts by secreting specific hormones; adrenaline or epinephrine and noradrenaline, or norepinephrin. These hormones, epinephrine and its related substances, bring about physiologic changes of increased blood pressure, heart rate, and body metabolism. The results of the fight or flight response are dramatic. Blood flow is redirected to the major muscles (thighs,
chest, arms) and away from the lower extremities. Although these major muscles are now primed for fight or flight, hand dexterity and coordination suffer from the vascular occlusion, resulting in deterioration of fine and complex motor skills.”

(Siddle 88-89)

If carefully managed and prepared for, this response can actually enhance a person’s ability to defend himself. On the other hand, these responses will make any training like that described above absolutely useless. **The effects of adrenaline mean that, in a self-defense situation, the mind will be unable to choose between techniques and the body will have extreme difficulty coordinating actions that are not sufficiently practiced.**

In the book *On Combat*, Lieutenant Colonel of the United States Army, psychology instructor, and combat researcher Dave Grossman has published a chart of the reactions of the sympathetic nervous system to hormonal or fear induced heart rate created as a result of his and colleagues’ research (Grossman 31). As noted above, when influenced by adrenaline, the heart rate instantly begins to rise. Different heart rate levels have been color coded; conditions white and yellow contain normal and alert heart rates from about 60 to 100 beats per minute. The mind is capable of controlling how fast the heart rate spikes to a certain and vital extent, but **no matter how experienced a man or woman is with stressful, combat situations, certain physiological and psychological effects will take place when confronted with conflict.**

At about 115 beats per minute (bpm) the body quickly enters what Grossman and colleagues call condition red. Here, and until about 145 bpm, a person is still capable of complex motor skills involving more than one gross movement, has increased reaction time, increased visual ability, and retains the ability to think quickly and may even be thinking faster and more clearly than normal. However, the body’s fine motor skills begin to deteriorate. This means that at the first, unavoidable level of stress, regardless of who you are, you will decrease in your ability to perform any actions involving intricate muscle control, work with the fingers, or actions requiring close hand to eye coordination (Siddle 43). These fine motor skills include complex self-defense techniques such as wrist locks and catching punches with your hand. As we’ll see, condition red has some very important consequences regarding the use of such techniques. Well trained individuals will be able to remain in condition red in stressful times, but most people will jump right past it into condition gray or black.

Above condition red is gray, where at 145 bpm the body begins to lose its ability to perform complex muscle skills. Most self-defense skills are complex muscle skills. Condition gray is where you don’t want to be. At the high end of this level, cognitive thought slows and degrades, the body’s blood moves towards the inner organs to prevent blood loss in a process called vasoconstriction, tunnel vision may occur, depth perception diminishes, and auditory exclusion may occur. Some highly trained individuals (very experienced military special operatives and law enforcement officers) have been found to be able control their stress levels to the point that they, in effect, extend condition red into condition gray. This means that when their heart rates are above 145 bpm, they remain functioning at peak efficiency until about 175 bpm. This level of training is what a true martial artist should strive for; this is the area where the body operates on autopilot. But this requires special and diligent training, involving modern methods of stress inoculation and role-playing and completely unlike what I believe the majority of martial artists are
getting. Those martial artists who lack the benefit of proper training will, unfortunately, progress directly to condition black.

Above condition gray is the ultimate danger for a person trying to defend herself; condition black. Here, above 175 bpm, a person will exhibit one of these exceptionally negative and frightening conditions; running mindlessly, fighting irrationally, freezing - known as hyper-vigilance (Siddle 83), or submissive behavior - crying and begging. At this level the mind is no longer capable of complex thought (the more primitive and subconscious midbrain has taken over) and the body is only capable of gross motor skills involving single actions such as lifting heavy things, running, or charging. As if that’s not enough, accompanying these reactions are voiding of the bladder and bowels. A person in condition black is incapable of defending himself with anything more than charging and swinging wildly. In a struggle against a calmer assailant, only the strongest man would stand any chance.

A martial artist simply cannot afford to enter condition black. If you are not sufficiently prepared for an actual self-defense situation you will almost certainly forget everything you’ve learned on those infrequent nights of training multiple techniques for the same attack. Without prior conditioning to this type of maximum stress, you will quickly enter condition black and either beg for mercy or rush your attacker, neither of which is likely to be very successful (begging and giving up your money may work for a mugger but not likely with a rapist or killer). Fortunately, there are ways to inoculate yourself against fear and the effects of the sympathetic nervous system. Unfortunately, these are not being taught in most martial arts schools.

A Sudden Fork in the Road: When you don’t have time to think

“There have always been two primary views on system design in survival training. One philosophy states that instructors should teach a large number of techniques. This theory advocates that the more response options a student has to face a threat, the better prepared he will be.

The second theory maintains that a more simplistic approach of keeping the number of response options to a minimum. The proponents of this system focus on a small number of techniques which students can learn quickly and easily while developing skill and confidence. Although there are strong arguments for both philosophies, the effects of stress and reaction time on decision making processes suggest that keeping response options to a minimum are preferred.”

- Bruce Siddle, Sharpening the Warriors Edge

Try this little exercise. Find a partner and tell them that you are going to slap them lightly on the right side of their head with your right hand. Tell them to get ready to block it or put their hand in the way (feel free to show them a good block to use and let them practice it). Let them know when you’re about to slap them but not exactly when, then, as quickly as you can, do it. If they didn’t block it successfully the first time, I’ll bet with a little practice they will easily. That is what it is like for a martial arts instructor showing off his effective techniques to a class. Now, later during that day or the next,
without telling them anything at all, just walk up to them, face to face, and slap them again. Did they block it that time? I'll bet you they didn't.

In combat there are two major forces acting against us, fear and surprise. There is more to preparing for combat than just knowing how to deal with fear, we must also understand how the mind reacts to an unexpected, sudden stimulus. Attacks often come with shocking suddenness and the defender has at least four mental steps to go through before he can defend himself; perception, identification, selection, and initiation (Siddle 64). First, he must recognize that an attack is occurring - this is called perception. Secondly, he must determine the type of attack and where it will strike – identification. Thirdly, if he's trained poorly, he must select an appropriate reaction. And finally, he must initiate that reaction, or act upon it. Now, while it is true that cognitive abilities increase in condition red, they do not increase to the point that you will have time to dally around in the selection phase and choose between multiple attacks while a punch is coming to hit your face. Furthermore, the shock and fear of being attacked will often make higher order thought completely impossible.

These realities spell doom for the type of self-defense training mentioned above. Learning and practicing multiple techniques for the same attack can create a dangerous and possibly fatal delay in the time it takes to react to an actual strike. In 1952, a study done by W.E. Hicks found that as the number of responses to a stimulus increased from just one to two, reaction times were raised by about 58 percent (Grossman 37). Although this study was done with typical button pushing responses, a later study relates directly to self-defense;

"A 1993 examination of Hick’s law and survival reaction time was conducted by Joe Ferrera. Ferrera conducted a simple study measuring the reaction rime of a single block to a punch at .183 milliseconds. When he increased the number of blocks (response options) to the strike from one to four, reaction time increased to .481 milliseconds. Hick’s research has strong implications for survival training...Even though the difference in time is in milliseconds, most instructors agree that half a second hesitation in a deadly force confrontation could be fatal" (Siddle 83).

There are more important factors at play during combat that will impact the time it takes to react to a threat. Reaction time has been found to be increased when stress and heart rate are increased (Siddle 83-4). As we’ve seen already, stress puts a major damper on our reactions and cognitive abilities. Also, a study by Franklin Henry and Donald Rogers in 1960 found that reaction times increased when the reaction skill involved more than one limb being coordinated, a series of actions, or a prolonged skill. Basically, as a skill becomes more complicated, the more time it will take because the brain needs more time to send the appropriate signals to all of the muscles involved. Every single one of these factors of complexity is involved in self-defense techniques. While the millisecond differences in reaction time didn’t seem like much before, things are starting to slow down rather dramatically.

The problems are well understood by many law enforcement training agencies and the military, but seem to have been missed by many modern martial arts instructors. In his report “Have Martial Artists Corrupted Defensive Tactics Training?” for Global
Security Training Limited, a company dedicated to training security officers, employee Robert Redenbach states that;

"If only one response to a cue is learned and practiced effectively it should become a reflex action. If presented with the appropriate cue, the response will occur quickly and automatically, without the need for conscious mental processing. If more than one response for a cue is learned, and that cue presents itself, a student would have to choose between responses, requiring mental processing rather than a much faster reflex response" (Redenbach 22).

In effect, a trainee who is taught to practice multiple responses to the same stimuli becomes a jack of all trades and a master of none. Although he knows a multitude of neat disarms and defenses, in an extreme situation he cannot perform any of them. Due to mental stalls created by the selection process, he will freeze and his response will be late and weak. In the case of self-defense, too much is really nothing at all.

**Taking the Wrong Path: When what you did learn wasn’t right**

"You do not rise to the occasion in combat, you sink to the level of your training."

The next problem with the typical training method is the ease with which poor practicing can become ingrained into your mind and endanger you. Thinking back to our “self-defense the wrong way” scenario, let us say that on that first night you practiced some form of throw or takedown, in other words, you put your partner on the ground. I’ll bet every time you knocked them down, you helped them back up almost immediately. In fact, you were probably told to help them back up. After all, it’s the courteous thing to do. And even though you practice different takedowns for the next four years, the one thing that remains the same is helping your partner up. Unfortunately for you, that was a big mistake. Now, when you are attacked, if you actually manage to take your attacker down to the ground (which would be a miracle considering your training), you’ll immediately help them back up. It may sound crazy, but it’s very likely. The mind and body will do what they are trained to do and only what they are trained to do, in a stressful situation. Actions that are commonly performed during self-defense training for a wide variety of well-meaning but misguided reasons, such as helping your partner up, letting them down softly, bowing, or signaling for an attack can easily transfer involuntarily to the real situation and make your defense ineffective. Just read this excerpt from Lt. Col. Dave Grossman’s *On Combat*;

“One police officer gave another example of learning to do the wrong thing. He took it upon himself to practice disarming an attacker. At every opportunity, he would have his wife, a friend, or a partner hold a pistol on him so he could practice snatching it away. He would snatch the gun, hand it back and repeat several more times. One day he and his partner responded to an unwanted man in
a convenience store. He went down one aisle, while his partner went down another. At the end of the first aisle he was taken by surprise when the suspect stepped around the corner and pointed a gun at him. In the blink of an eye, the officer snatched the gun away, shocking the gunman with his speed and finesse. No doubt this criminal was surprised and confused even more when the officer handed the gun right back to him, just as he had practiced hundreds of times before. Fortunately for this officer, his partner came around the corner and shot the subject” (Grossman 72).

Grossman also tells the example of police officers who practiced firing their firearms at the range, catching the empty shell casings from their revolvers into their hands and stuffing them into their pockets. Only then would they reload and continue shooting. Then, after several shootouts, many officers were finding bullet casings in their pockets without remembering having put them there. Several officers were found dead with casings in their hands, having been shot while trying to collect their brass (Grossman 72). Another group of policemen trained in apprehending suspects using their fingers as mock guns, pointing them and shouting at the suspect to lay down their weapons, turn around, and assume the search position. Then, “officers began reporting to the training unit that they had pointed with their fingers in real arrest situations” (Grossman 72). These stories sound too strange or ridiculous to be true, but when we think about them from a psychological standpoint, they make perfect sense. Motor training is a type of learning that involves conditioning to develop automatic, involuntary responses to stimulus (Siddle 30). If you ingrain improper responses into your mind with consistent training, you will perform those involuntarily too.

Even consistently pulling certain blows or strikes can become ingrained, making you stop short of the full strike when a powerful blow is needed. In this case safety can be maintained in training and the problem of ingrained pulling counteracted by interspersing pulled strikes to the target area with conscious, full force strikes past or outside of the target and consistent, full force training with padded partners or dummies (man shaped targets are usually better than heavy bags).

In my own experience in training with other martial artists, I have noticed experienced students of other schools who, when told to practice striking their partner when down, continue to automatically help them up every time. They have practiced doing it so often that they cannot turn it off, even when consciously thinking about it in a calm, controlled, training environment. Think how much more likely a person is to perform an improper but ingrained involuntary response in the chaos and split-second timing of combat when the mind doesn’t have time to consciously think about anything.
Separate Paths: The dangers of stylism

“A so-called martial artist is the result of three thousand years of propaganda and conditioning.”

- Bruce Lee, The Tao of Jeet Kune Do

At the same time many martial artists are practicing too many techniques, they are also frequently practicing too few techniques. To explain this seeming contradiction, I offer this explanation; while a martial artist from a typical modern school might learn five different self-defense techniques for a given type of attack on a certain day, she is only taught techniques for 12 types of attacks over the course of her training. In other words, she “knows” five ways to get out of a lapel grab and four different ways to counteract a bearhug, but she has no idea how to defend against a wrestler’s shoot or what to do if she gets taken down to the ground. This affliction of too many reflexes for too few stimuli is largely the result of a type of martial arts prejudice that I refer to as stylism.

Stylism can result from prejudice or simple ignorance but manifests itself in the thought that one’s particular martial arts style or school is all the training required to defend oneself. Some martial artists believe that their style is simply the best style around and everything else is useless. Others have never really done much thinking about the matter and are simply ignorant that there are other types of attacks out there. Still others believe, because it makes them feel safer, that the techniques taught at their dojo can protect them against any type of attack.

A common phrase among martial artists who focus on striking styles goes something like this “I don’t need to know grappling (ground fighting), I’ll just stay back and kick and punch them until they can’t fight anymore.” Wrong! Mixed martial arts matches in the 1990’s proved time and again that even the most experienced standing fighters could not escape the traps, shoots, and grabs of the grapplers (Gracie 42). As immigration and increased transportation allowed different martial arts to finally come in contact with one another, and as a result of these mixed fighting matches, martial arts fighters began to realize that they would need to study all forms of contact to win in the ring. They were forced to break through their prejudice and recognize that their style was not superior and that they could not limit their opponent to fighting their way. Now, what makes a student of self-defense in one style think they can do any better against an attacker who was a high school wrestler or who studied boxing instead of Tae Kwon Do?

If your training ignores certain types of strikes, holds, and manners of fighting, you may find yourself terribly surprised when an attacker attacks in a completely foreign way. The great danger of stylism is that it leaves holes in your knowledge, which may be hazardous to your survival.
The majority of martial arts practiced today are rooted in military or combat training. Now wait a minute, you say, what about Bodhidharma? First, I wouldn't put too much stock in rather mythological stories over the more anthropologically sound concept that nearly all cultures developed or altered methods of fighting in response to violence. Second, there are many surviving martial arts in the world outside of those with their roots in Shaolin kung-fu. Third, while the majority of Asian martial arts may or may not have stemmed from the exercise teachings of that fabled traveler from India to a group of tired monks, I would not entitle those exercises as truly being “martial” until they were used for combative purposes. And fourth, regardless of their original origin, the fact remains that almost all martial arts quickly became adapted for military or paramilitary use. For centuries they were taught to and used by soldiers on the battlefield.

The battlefield is the ultimate example of Darwinian selection outside of nature. I believe that war created a selective pressure on martial arts training that kept it effective and useful. Here is my reasoning: those techniques that worked allowed the defender using them to survive in battle and continue to teach those skills to new soldiers. Even those soldiers who came to the fight with poor techniques and survived would quickly realize whether their techniques were effective or useless and would change their training accordingly so as to not push their luck in the next battle. In order to better survive combat, soldiers spent much of their lives training very hard with their weapons and hands, drilling and exercising constantly (as they still do in modern times). They practiced their techniques far more often than the two or three nights a week most martial artists today spend at the local dojo. This we know to be true because soldiers were housed and fed by, and spent every moment of their service living and training with, their army. They were paid, or at least fed and clothed, to train for winning battles. These early soldiers and martial artists were warriors. They trained with total tenacity, as if their lives depended on their training, because their lives did depend on their training.

For most martial artists today there is no such method of selection. The majority of martial artists are not soldiers and many will never see even see a street fight. Only those who do see hand to hand combat will really know if their techniques work or not. These can return to their classes or training centers and teach what worked for them. The majority, however, has no way of knowing the effectiveness of their training. This, along with the twentieth century invention of martial sports, is why so many ineffective training methods and techniques are becoming part of the typical dojo regimen. The relative peacefulness of the modern world has begun to degrade self-defense training.

Meanwhile, for those in the military that do see combat, hand-to-hand training is becoming less and less a priority. While special forces train more extensively in fighting arts and a few other national armies still train in combat effective arts (such as Krav Maga of the Israeli Defense forces), soldiers spend the vast majority of their training learning firearms and artillery, because that is what they need to know. Both sides in a conflict will be carrying high powered guns and both sides will attempt to shoot before they duke it out. Hand to hand combat and self-defense is no longer a significant part of warfare and is fading out of military training. Soldiers, the people most responsible for
testing, developing, and passing on the martial arts, no longer need them. And, those that do need the martial arts cannot test their techniques in the same way that soldiers were forced too. Thus, we must find new ways of testing our training. We must utilize modern science to tell us how the body will react to stress and how to overcome those complications. We must pay close attention to reports from battles, attacks, and combat where self-defense was used and tweak our training based on what worked and failed for others. We must stick diligently to the more traditional methods of training that we know were used by soldiers of ancient times. Furthermore, we must mimic our training as closely as possible to tested and proven training methods for the modern military and law enforcement. With training such as stress inoculation it does not matter whether you are training with a gun or with your hands.

Of course, some might say that my description of the ancient martial arts as battlefield arts is a dream only and that I am advocating a return to a type of training that never existed. In reality, they may be correct. There is no way to know how the ancient warriors actually trained; we can only guess based on what has been handed down. As a counter argument, one will notice that the more traditional and further from sport a style is, the more it is based on repetition and brutal self-defense techniques. The question of how much the training outlined in this paper is a call for modern approaches to training, as opposed to a return to ancient methods, can never be answered. But, in reality, the answer is irrelevant. We cannot know if martial artists have ever before walked the true path to personal protection, but we do know that there is such a path. There are many accounts of highly trained martial artists and combative experts who have survived attacks and dangerous situations by training in a manner that allowed them to switch to “autopilot” and act on instinct. We also know, based on modern science and testing, that the path of protection is being obscured by modern sport arts and improper training methods.

The end result of this discussion remains that techniques are being taught in martial arts schools that will not be effective on the street against a determined, stronger attacker. And martial artists have begun to put the majority of their training time into methods which neither mimic combat nor prepare the student for it. In fact, I argue that the very two methods that have become most prevalent, and almost synonymous with the martial arts, were once only supplementary to actual combative training. Those two methods are kata and sparring.

Kata, its uses and abuses

Kata is probably the best known Japanese word associated with the martial arts today. It means literally pattern or mold (“Kata”). The name is fitting, as kata are made up of predetermined patterns of a style’s moves and techniques. While the movements often appear simple, most often there are hidden techniques disguised in the way the movements are combined. For most of the history of the martial arts, kata and basic movement repetition was the only way in which techniques were passed down from teacher to student. Kata was how a person could remember and practice their style by herself. The hidden, more advanced techniques and the meanings behind the moves (or “bunkai”) were taught to trustworthy students who had mastered the kata as a way of
keeping the style's individual techniques secret. Martial arts instructors in early China and Japan made their living and reputation by the strength and effectiveness of their teachings; they were often concerned about other teachers learning their techniques. In fact, this desire to keep each style separate and secret is likely a major cause of stylism today. Despite this unproductive secretiveness, the advanced, hidden movements were how self-defense techniques were passed on and remembered.

Today, many of these kata have been retained and continue to be practiced by the more traditional martial arts styles. However, many traditionalists place too much emphasis on kata. Don't get me wrong, kata have great value. Many martial artists state that they help them develop a spiritual peacefulness, focus, and a stillness in motion. If done properly they are great ways to train the individual simple and hidden moves alone. When they are performed with power and speed they are great methods to develop the explosive power and short term stamina needed in combat, as they are very similar to sprint training. They develop focus, ease of motion, correct technique, and proper breathing for physically intense activities - like fighting. Certain kata can be best used for specific training goals and can help develop particular attributes such as balance, speed, or power. But if practiced improperly kata can be a complete waste of time, and martial artists must realize that kata is not self-defense training and that if they practice kata too much or exclusively they will not be preparing themselves sufficiently for actual combat.

"No, you can't do a kata on someone who attacks you" (Morgan 73). No opponent will attack you in a predetermined pattern. No fight will continue out past the first couple of strikes in the way that the kata does. And, since there is no physical opponent, the actual power, force, and movement necessary to perform a technique on a larger, stronger person can never be fully learnt (and some of these techniques will require considerable strength even when done correctly). Most importantly, the necessary stimulus to develop reactions to attacks is not there in a kata. No one is actually providing you with the attack to defend against. You cannot learn to recognize the attack and develop the all important instinctive reaction; “research indicates that the focus of our training should be directed at the development of automatic responses to a specific threat stimuli” (Siddle 38). Kata are a valuable physical and spiritual training tool, but they will not, by themselves, make you able to defend yourself.

**Sparring, its uses and abuses**

In order for students of combat arts to train against actual people and in order to compensate for some of the inadequacies of kata, a famous martial artist, Kano, created what we now know as free sparring for Judo, which was adapted for striking arts as well (Morgan 66, Gracie 11-7). Free sparring offers martial artists some major advantages in training. Now you can train against a live opponent, who will move and react to everything you do. This allows you to develop timing and targeting, quicken your reactions, and get an actual feeling of the amount of power and positioning necessary to perform a technique. These are all qualities that are necessary for training but cannot be learned from kata alone.
Unfortunately, sparring presents its own inherent problems. Safety is a major issue when using combat effective techniques with a partner in sparring. In order to keep ourselves and our partner alive and healthy, certain rules must be established to limit techniques. Obviously, if we wore no protective equipment, fought with full force and did not limit potentially maiming or deadly techniques, sparring would be no different than an actual fight and very soon there would be no one left to spar with. So, from the beginning of free sparring, rules were applied to keep the dangerous techniques controlled. This is not a major problem in itself, but rules soon led to adaptations of fighting techniques and even entire styles to fit within those rules and make their trainees better sparring fighters. For instance, in many styles, groin strikes are not allowed, even with groin protection. While this does keep everyone safer in sparring, it limits their combat effectiveness. Having never practiced them in sparring or on another person, martial artists will be unable to use their most potent techniques when it really matters. And they will be unable to defend against strikes, grabs, and holds that were barred in their sparring.

The limiting of strikes has much of its origins in safety, but it also results from stylism. For instance, many Japanese or Korean striking arts will not allow kicks below the belt in sparring. They pretend that these attacks do not exist, but they will have a difficult time facing the low kicks of Muay Thai kickboxers, in the ring or on the street. The American Tae Kwon Do Association does not allow punches to the face or head. From personal experience, many Tae Kwon Do fighters have difficulty blocking strikes to their face. They will be in a hard spot if they are attacked by a mugger with even a little boxing experience. As I noted before, many styles simply refuse to realize that there are other forms of fighting then their own or allow those techniques in their sparring. Whether this results from prejudice or ignorance does not matter, the end result is the same. Their trainees are lacking essential skills and will be unable to defend against unfamiliar attacks.

Sparring has become a victim of stylism but, even more dangerously, it has also become a way of furthering the training and ingraining of improper responses. Rules of sparring were passed on through generations of styles’ practitioners and eventually culminated in their worst form, point sparring. Point sparring is essentially a sport and is the prime form of competition in martial sports like Tae Kwon Do and Judo. Sparring strikes are limited to specific target areas depending on the style, and the force of the techniques is limited to light or touching contact. Every time a fighter hits their opponent or throws them, they score a certain number of points and then they stop, return to their starting positions to hear the score called and start over again.

This creates a whole mess of problems. Point sparring fighters never learn to take hits, or dish them out as boxers can. They learn to hit their opponent softly and, as soon as they touch a target area, to stop, backup and start again. As we’ve learned earlier, what a person does in training, they will do in actuality. From my personal experience, I’ve seen many martial artists who, trained in point sparring and entering into more realistic sparring (which will be discussed later), have a very difficult time learning to continue fighting after they’ve hit or been hit. They stop, begin to backup, and are immediately pummeled by several hard strikes for their effort. Again, it must be reiterated that not all schools train this way. There are instructors who stress constant awareness and continuous, open-holds and strikes sparring (as we’ll discuss later). But
those that do train this way are endangering their students. Can you imagine the devastating result of hitting your mugger in the chest with a light blow, then dropping your hands and backing up to start again? Or of being hit and then dropping your defenses, expecting your striker to stop hurting you?

**To spar or not to spar**

Obviously, there must be some rules in place during sparring in order to keep trainees healthy. Some techniques can maim or kill, and strikes to targets like the temple, eyes, and throat can cause serious damage if not safely pulled. But for many misguided martial artists who recognized the danger of using their style’s techniques during sparring, the answer was to refuse sparring all together and stick to safe, old kata.

“What many people fail to realize, however, is that these dangerous moves are physical skills like any other. As such, it takes realistic practice to perfect their application, the same way it takes practice to perfect a golf swing or slam dunk a basketball. Just as nobody could hope to make it into the National Basketball Association by only practicing basketball kata, nobody can likewise hope to master the realistic application of these deadly moves through a martial art kata” (Gracie 19).

Even today many martial artists look at point sparring and scoff (rightly so), but say that their real techniques are too dangerous to use in sparring and so they must stick to kata. A division has developed in the world’s martial arts community between point sparring fighters and kata trainers, none of whom have any concept of a proper middle ground. Unfortunately, when it comes to real combat situations, both camps will lose. Sparring must be done in such a way as to mimic real fights as closely as possible and to enhance and build upon self-defense techniques. Kata must be performed to condition the body and train certain attributes. Just like Kata, free sparring too is valuable for training certain attributes, but for the martial artist who practices to defend herself, both are meant to be supplementary to self-defense training.

**The dangers of self-defense books**

If you’ve been interested in self-defense before and have ever visited that section in your local library, you have my sympathy. What you probably saw, if your library is anything like mine, is a multitude of poorly written books on the subject of how to defend yourself; most of them from twenty, thirty, or even fifty years ago and each teaching its own particular style of defense. The book written by the Karate instructor teaches you how to kick and hit your assailant, while the Judo instructor provided pictures and explanations on how to throw your attacker to the ground. The book written by the non-martial artist self-defense instructor probably had a lot of very simply and insufficiently effective techniques. Many of those books likely have titles like “The Ultimate Guide to Self-defense” or “The Complete Self-defense Manual,” yet they are
worse than merely incomplete, they are stylist. I have seen many books with such titles, but when I look inside those ultimate guides written by Karate instructors, there is not one mention of how to fight on the ground (where the majority of fights and almost all rape attempts end up – where women especially need to know how to defend themselves). In those written by Judo or Jujitsu teachers, there is no mention of the shoot from modern wrestling (likely the most probable training any aggressor might have in America) or how to defend against the boxer’s jab. Stylist has permeated the martial arts so much that it even fills books written for the public’s defense. But the public, not knowing what stylist is and having never been informed of the danger, unwittingly buy into ridiculous and false claims of “this is the best style” or “the Complete Book of Self-Defense.” Do not make this same mistake. Any teacher who tells you that his way is the only and best way is wrong and you should seek a new trainer immediately. No book is ever complete; no one style is the way.

Never try to learn self-defense from a book alone. The best place to get the training remains in good martial arts schools or police and military training facilities. None of the books I have seen mention anything about stress inoculation or training to perform under the effects of fear. They offer overly simplistic defenses for how to escape simple grabs and hit the opponent enough to run away, most of which will be hard to perform with any certainty or power under pressure. Be particularly wary of women’s self-defense books that offer solutions like kicking the bad guys in the groin or stomping with the heels and running. The writers of these books don’t seem to realize that men affected by adrenaline (epinephrine) can often ignore the feeling of even a hard a strike to the groin and that most men – especially the predatory variety – can run faster than most women. I’ll talk more on the consequences of these facts later and how to overcome them, but when choosing books, just remember that the more brutal it seems, the more realistic it probably is. Books can certainly supplement your knowledge but learning from pictures and not from practice is no way to train for the realities of combat. If you’re stuck and you have absolutely no place to train in your area then pick some of the best, more brutal books from multiple styles and find a dedicated, bigger friend to help you train very, very hard.
A Straighter Path: The solution to the problems of modern self-defense training

"Do not expect the combat fairy to come bonk you on the head with the combat wand and suddenly make you capable of doing things you never rehearsed before. It will not happen."


Earlier we examined the classic example of how not to train. We saw that inconsistent and seldom practice is not training and that learning too many techniques will make you ineffective or cause you to freeze during stressful situation. We learned that stylism leads to knowing too few attacks and creates gaps in our self-defense abilities. We saw, too, that poor training ingrains undesirable responses into our minds. We showed that the modern martial arts self-defense method is not based on the reality of combat. Now, what do we do about it?

Merging Paths: The solution to stylism

"The way of combat is not based on personal choice or fancies. Truth in the way of combat is perceived from moment to moment and only when there is awareness without condemnation, justification, or any form of identification."

- Bruce Lee, *The Tao of Jeet Kune Do*

No matter the cause or form it takes in an individual martial artist, stylism has been a major failing of martial arts students since the beginning of the art. Miyamoto Musashi, the Sword-saint of Japan, who never knew defeat, combated this prejudice in 1645 when he admonished the schools of his time in the *Book of Five Rings*: "In the Way of strategy as a warrior you must study fully other martial arts and not deviate even a little from the Way of the Warrior" (Musashi 94).

Just thirty years ago perhaps the most famous martial artist of all time, Bruce Lee, echoed Musashi’s statements and created the philosophy of Jeet Kune Do to encompass all forms of fighting. His words, posthumously reprinted in *The Tao of Jeet Kune Do*, angered many in the martial arts community who had become too blindly attached to the words of their teachers and too secure in their way of training;

"Stylists, instead of looking directly into the fact, cling to forms (theories) and go on entangling themselves further and further, finally putting themselves into an inextricable snare" (Lee 14).

Lee’s solution was simple and direct: martial artists must free themselves from styles and begin to learn all forms of combat, taking only what works for each person individually;
Unfortunately, while many today respect Bruce Lee as one of the greatest martial artists of all time, few understood or took his words to heart, either because they could not or would not. Jeet Kune Do has become corrupted by others and is now taught as a style in itself. On the other hand, there is yet hope, as the open martial arts matches mentioned before have sparked a movement in those who can see that there are lessons to be learned from those fights. The answer to stylism is what has become most recently known as mixed martial arts, learning multiple forms of combat and training from any style you see until you are able to mix techniques and form your own personal way of fighting that enables you to survive in any type of fight.

The Path that Travels Everywhere: Not allowing attacks to be “not allowed”

“The final ingredient is integration. As you begin developing skills from a variety of doctrines, you must learn to integrate them into an effective personal arsenal. Our taekwondoist should learn to blend his Korean tactics with those from Japanese karate. The judo man should learn to blend punching and kicking with the grappling techniques of his core art. The final product should be a smooth fighter, effective at all ranges, in any situation.”

- Maj. Forrest E. Morgan, Living the Martial Way

Mixed martial arts has become more than a prize fighting competition. It is an idea that is synonymous with the original ideal of Jeet Kune Do. It is beautiful in its simplicity. Train in all forms of fighting and learn from all styles; in short, mix the martial arts.

Make sure that stylism has no part in your training. You do not need to sacrifice your favored style, but try to learn from others as well. In fact, it is a good idea to learn the basics of movement from one particular school and then pick up other styles along the way. You will find it easier to learn other styles with a strong background in one form of using your body. As long as you have an open mind and are intelligent in your practicing, this will not make it harder to grow as a martial artist (for an excellent discussion of these issues, please read “The Roots of Combat” by Bruce Thomas: see works cited below). Simply learn from all styles and incorporate the mixed martial arts mindset into your self-defense training. Draw strikes from striking styles, takedowns from throwing styles, and breaks and locks from grappling styles and put them all together into working defenses for any type of attack. If you see a new type of attack, make sure you can defend against it. (If you don’t have a suitable defense, modify one of your existing techniques to work. Learn a new defense only as a last resort and then try to choose one that resembles your other defenses). Don’t make the mistake of knowing too many techniques, but don’t make the mistake of knowing too few attacks either.

This concept has been practiced by the best martial artists throughout history, but the mediocre masses have always shied away from the idea. They continue to avoid
realistic training, because it means casting aside their guru status as trained martial artists and going back to learn in an arena where they are beginners again. Instead they use stylism as a crutch to defend their fragile egos. But get this; your ego will not protect you in a self-defense situation, only your training will.

The Straight and Narrow: The fewer the better

Now that you’ve removed stylism from your thinking and you know to train defenses against all types of attacks, it’s time to begin selecting techniques. But first, how many different techniques do you get to learn? Well, when choosing your defenses, there’s one all important motto to remember; keep it simple.

It’s true, knowing twenty different takedowns for the hook punch is cool, but it is also useless. Remember Hick’s and Ferrara’s studies? The fewer techniques you know the more time you’ll have to react. Knowing one technique per stimulus will eliminate mental overflow or freezing up. In this project there are at least 26 different basic ways a person can attack you without a weapon (these are listed in the access file of the project portion). Can you imagine knowing even five techniques for each of those? One technique per stimulus is enough. Why would you need to know more than one anyway? If your first defense doesn’t work, your attacker is not going to give you a chance to try another defense for the same attack. And other attackers aren’t going to be standing around analyzing your techniques so they can overcome them. If your initial defense fails you must either defend against the next attack or switch to your basic techniques. By the time your defense fails, it is too late for a backup technique.

The first thing to do is to choose your techniques from what your martial arts teachers can teach you, from books, or from collections of techniques like this one. During this initial stage it is alright to learn more than one and experiment until you find which ones work the best for you (more on choosing techniques later). But eventually you want to find the technique that works best for each attack and stick to it. Forget all of the others. You might hold them somewhere in the back of your conscious mind to teach them to students in the future, but you don’t really need to do that either. That’s what picture collections like The Path of Protection are for. From now on you practice that technique for that attack every time. You don’t practice what the guy next to you is practicing, or what the guest instructor is teaching that night (sure, go through the motions with him just to be nice, but don’t bother trying to really learn it, and it would even be smart to practice your own technique immediately after just to pave over the foreign techniques in your mind). Your own personal techniques are what you practice every time.

Why Follow a Path?: On reactionary or technique-less self-defense

Now it is time to discuss the question of why one should learn special techniques at all. As noted above, many would say that it is easier to rely on basic blocks, kicks, and punches in self-defense. After all, these are what martial artists spend the majority of their time training in initially. A well trained fighter spends a lot of time learning to
recognize openings and strike them in rapid succession. Why doesn’t everyone train to do this in a self-defense situation?

The first argument against using basics alone is that it is too slow and unreliable. Striking your opponent is unlikely to be as effective as a complete self-defense technique with a take-down and finishing techniques. Believers might cite the ancient concept of one-strike, one-kill but in reality the ability to down a determined attacker with a single strike requires nearly superhuman accuracy and power. The attacker will be moving around a good deal and your ability to plant that perfect, devastating punch on his anatomically weak target will be greatly minimized. A well planned technique, on the other hand, will take advantage of much more accessible principles like stunning, leverage, and balance and allow you to much more quickly put your attacker in a compromising position. Using basics can too easily turn into a fighting match. What is to stop your attacker from punching and kicking back at you? And, as he will likely be larger and stronger than you, is that a situation you really want to allow? Can you imagine exchanging blows with a large boxer? Or trying to use basic wrestling techniques against a wrestler? While you might come out on top, these would put you in a dangerous, uncertain situation. With multiple attackers the danger is greatly enhanced. Fighting or grappling with one of them (even striking them a couple of times) will quickly end up in you being grabbed or struck from behind. A well planned technique will use openings and likely reactions in a pre-planned strategy that will be faster and more efficient than merely striking what becomes open. There are effective techniques that consist solely of a series of strikes, but these are pre-planned to best utilize the expected openings with powerful hits and kicks. And in my mind, there is nothing wrong with adding to these the full components of a self-defense technique including a take-down and finishing moves (see The Construction of a Complete Technique below) to be on the safe side. It would seem much more efficient to take them down to the ground with an initial stunning hit and a technique, where his abilities are neutralized.

This brings me to the second argument against using basics alone. Many holds and ground fighting especially will not allow you to use effective kicks and punches. Strikes remain possible in these positions, and are still essential for a good defense, but are much less effective. Some sort of hold-escape or ground-fighting techniques will be necessary to even get into a position where you can strike again. You will not find it easy to beat your attacker into submission when he grabs you. One might try to argue that the initial strikes will free you from the hold, but keep in mind the body’s ability to ignore pain during high stress. Most times when I’ve been struck while holding someone, I winced but accepted the pain and found a way to quickly block or neutralize their strikes by grappling them. There is a reason that hold-escape techniques have been handed down for centuries.

While these realities mean that techniques are a better option than striking by reaction without technique or plan, that does not mean that training for reactive striking response is unnecessary. Simply put, if your techniques fail during a self-defense situation, you will need to be able to fight. If your attacker is too fast or strong for your techniques to work, or if you aren’t able to perform them for whatever reason, instinctive striking to open targets or grappling will be your last line of defense. You can’t just fight wildly, you must train as fighters do to recognize openings immediately and strike them. Train to block instinctively and fight on. Perhaps you’ll set yourself up for another
technique or perhaps you’ll merely win the fight. The bottom line, however, is this: don’t rely solely on striking to defend yourself. These skills are important, but do not constitute the best way. Choose techniques that will become your first instincts instead and use them to take your attacker out much more quickly, efficiently, and safely.

Picking Your Path: Choosing techniques and designing doctrines

“In essence, the ideal survival skill should be kept as simple as possible in technique complexity, technique response time, and theory of application.”

- Bruce Siddle, Sharpening the Warrior’s Edge

There are thousands of self-defense techniques out there. Almost every distinct culture that has ever existed on Earth has had its own martial art or fighting method, and every method contained a variety of offensive and defensive techniques. Certainly, many of these techniques are similar or the same, but there remains a huge variety of ways in which a person can deal with an attack. On one hand, the vast range of choices means there is almost certainly a technique for every type of attack that will fit your needs and even your personality. On the other hand, the sheer amount of techniques may seem daunting and you may find it difficult to choose between them. Do not simply choose at random which ever skill looks the most impressive, however. There are guidelines to follow when designing your personal self-defense skill set.

First of all, choose techniques that fit your body and capabilities. Certain skills require a large amount of strength to accomplish, or a high level of quickness to pull off. There are techniques that will work for a man that will not work for a woman and some that are not suitable for larger men. You must know your body and your capabilities when you begin choosing techniques. Practice them with a realistic partner (a larger, stronger man) and see if they will work when the attacker is not expecting them. Make sure you have the strength, speed, or coordination to finish the technique. If not, choose another technique that better fits your body. Some of these attributes can be improved with practice, but it is better to start with a technique that feels natural and relatively easy from the beginning.

Along those same lines, choose techniques that do feel natural and intuitive to your body. For whatever reason, people simply understand and perform certain types of techniques better than others. Perhaps the motions are similar to other actions they’ve done regularly. In any case, those techniques will be the easiest to learn and practice. They will become conditioned into your reflexes more quickly because they are natural movements to you.

Also, techniques that use gross body movements with as few complex moves will be more likely to succeed under stress. Gross, large muscle movements will be stronger and faster with adrenaline, while complex movements will be less likely to succeed because; “motor skills that are moderate in motor control and cognitive complexity will produce best results during moderate levels of stress. Motor skills that use large muscle mass (gross motor skills) and are cognitively simple (require very little decision making)
produce optimal performance during high levels of stress” (Siddle 46). Combat, as stated so many times, is a high level of stress situation.

Choose techniques that apply to multiple attack types and that guard multiple target areas. Not all techniques are created equal. Some are more effective and versatile than others and you will see those being applied for many different types of attacks. The more versatile the techniques you learn are, the less you’ll have to learn. Also, let us say you haven’t practiced enough and you freak when you’re faced with a certain attack. The more versatile your other techniques are, the more likely one of them will kick in and apply to that attack.

Along the same line, many different self-defense techniques are based on the same skills. Combine the same counter and takedowns with different blocks or hold escapes. The more similar your techniques are the less you’ll have to learn and the faster you’ll become proficient with them. As you choose techniques that are similar, you’ll begin to develop a doctrine of self-defense. You should have one to four central themes or skills that all of your techniques are based on. For example, in my own practice, almost all of my techniques use some method of controlling the head. Thus, no matter what I’m defending against, I know to seek out my opponent’s head and use it for my technique. I have developed a central doctrine of head control in my own self-defense “style.” Yours may revolve around a certain type of wrist lock, or knee strikes, or foot sweeps, or whatever you choose. Decide on a doctrine once you’ve had enough experience with techniques, or when you find a doctrine that you like and that works particularly well for you. Choose one that makes sense for your body type and that seems natural to you and stick with it. Try to make your techniques as similar as possible and you will find that ingraining them as reflexes will become much easier.

The construction of a complete technique: more than just hit and run

A good self-defense technique is made up of multiple parts, these are...

**Defenses Against Strikes**
1. Block or Evasion
2. Counter strike/Channel changer
3. Takedown
4. Finishing moves (strikes/breaks/holds)

**Defense Against Holds and Grabs**
1. Counter strike/Channel changer
2. Hold escape (possible second counter)
3. Takedown
4. Finishing moves

Although things may sometimes go well for you in a self-defense situation, you cannot expect to just hit them and run. A good technique should follow through on the above steps. First, a technique for defense against a strike must contain some form of block or evasion. Obviously you cannot allow yourself to get hit. You must block or move. When you are forced to defend yourself at this first step, your hands should be up and you should be ready to block or move again. Immediately following your block or evasion and preferably at the same time, your technique should contain a counter, a stop-hit, or a channel changer. These are all terms used to describe a quick, hard strike to a sensitive area on the attacker’s body to focus his attention off of what he is doing and onto defending himself. The more simultaneous your defense and counter are, the more
likely you are to strike them. The harder you strike him, the freer you'll be to use your
next movement. If you are being grabbed or held, the first step will usually be this
counter strike or channel changer. Depending on the defense, the counter phase may
contain many hard strikes and last for some time. In these defenses, this is the major part
of the defense and these strikes should be down with power and conviction. (In some
styles, such as Aikido, the channel changer is not actually a strike, since practitioners of
these styles do not wish to cause their attacker physical harm. Instead, they fake a strike
to the face or eyes, which should have a lessened, but similar effect).

In a defense against a grab or hold, the next step should be the escape. This
consists of some movement to dislodge the attackers offending clutch. In a strike defense,
this is obviously not necessary.

Next is the hardest but most important phase of any technique: the takedown.
This may be as simple as a foot sweep or a hard kick to the legs to make the attacker fall,
or it may be a more complicated throw from styles such as Jujitsu or Aikido. In some
defenses that concentrate on hard counter strikes, this may not even be necessary but, just
to be on the safe side, it is best for the technique to contain some takedown movement.
During the takedown, you must always practice being consciously aware of what you are
doing and of your surroundings.

Immediately following the takedown is finishing movement of some sort. These
can vary from strikes to vital or sensitive targets to joint locks or breaks. In some
situations, especially with multiple attackers, it would be foolish to apply a hold or a joint
lock. Avoid entering into grappling matches in all of your finishing moves. In very
serious self-defense situations, finishing moves should consist of quick debilitating
strikes or breaks. Then again, in less serious situations, such as a simple snatch and run
or man getting pushy at the bar, it would be extreme to damage your attacker. The most
fitting finishing technique will vary depending on the situation, so it is vital that you
practice consciously thinking about what you are doing during the takedown. The rest of
your technique should be pure instinct, but here, as soon as you have the chance, you
must make a conscious decision of what to do. A good practice would be to make your
finishing technique a quick strike to a painful but non-vital target and then stand up, or to
remain standing after the takedown and kick to such a target. If you do this and your
opponent begins to get up again, you can always follow them down again or strike them
as they rise for more drastic measures. Practicing making these decisions during training
and use situational training (discussed later) to help you learn the correct actions.

Now, some techniques do consist solely of basics and do not contain takedowns,
or their takedowns are kicks or strikes to the legs. These can still be reliable, as long as
the strikes within them are sufficiently powerful and directed at devastating targets.
They should be capable of putting a person on the ground with striking power alone.
They should be designed to take advantage of large, reliable openings after attacks or the
initial strike. An example of a striking-only technique that can be just as effective as a
takedown comes from Krav Maga. The response to a person coming behind to grab you
is to elbow strike him multiple times avoiding the grab, turn to ridge-hand their throat,
grab them and use multiple knee strikes to their groin and solar plexus, bending them
over or knocking them down. Then the defender can elbow strike on their back to knock
them to the ground and kick them while they are down. Note that the initial defensive
strikes are very powerful, put the attacker in extreme pain, and put him in a position

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where he can easily be knocked down or would fall down on his own. This sort of powerful and easily-targeted (knee strikes are much easier to land than punches to the throat or solar-plexus) strikes are necessary to make an effective self-defense. Be wary of techniques that consist only of strikes that are difficult to make or that could be shrugged off by a person who is resistant to pain.

When to run?

Many martial arts instructors overemphasize running, especially for women. They will tell you that you merely need to escape the grab or hold, hit them once or twice and run. Even after performing a takedown, they will tell you to run away immediately. Now, I don’t like to advocate violence and if running would always work, I’d tell you to run away as soon as you can too. Unfortunately those instructors are overlooking some important facts. First of all, for women’s self-defense, the average man can run faster than the average woman. Furthermore, attackers, based on predatory psychology (simply that social predators choose smaller, weaker, less confident looking people to prey upon) have a very good probability of being more fit than the defender. Even for men’s self-defense, the defender is not likely to win a race against his attacker. And this is a very serious race. If you simply turn and run, unless you have someplace very close by to run to, he will most likely catch you. Furthermore, that one strike you got off before you ran is not likely to have much effect on an adrenaline pumped male. Even a “shot to the groin” can be ignored by a man hyped up on anger, danger, and excitement. That one hit may just make him run after you that much faster and be that much angrier when he catches you. Even after you’ve knocked him down, what will keep him from getting up and running after you? Nothing. Furthermore, running puts your back to your attacker and leaves you much more vulnerable from behind.

There may be a time when you have no choice but to run. If your techniques are useless against the size and power of a much larger, more fit attacker (or a trained one), your best option may be to escape and run for your life. But when you train properly you should be able to damage your opponent to the point that running becomes a viable option. That is why each technique you train must contain the counters, the escape, the takedown, and the finishing techniques. In a serious situation, those final strikes exist to make it so you can run away. If your attacker has a broken arm or leg, is knocked unconscious by a strike to the temple, or has a crushed larynx, he will be not be in any condition to win that deadly race.

Knowing where to hit, not just how

“I have taught many young women, and I could not sleep at night if I told a four-foot-eleven-inch girl of ninety-two pounds that a kick in the groin and a combination punch to the face is going to stop a six-foot-four-inch, two-hundred-and-forty-pound weight lifter.”

- Master Hei Long, Dragon’s Touch: Weaknesses of the Human Anatomy
The counter strikes of a self-defense technique, and any strikes after that, can be very effective if well thrown with full power and force. I say can be because, obviously, even a well executed, full-force strike will have little effect if it is to the chest. You must invest time in training where to strike, and designing your defense techniques with pressure-points and anatomical targets in mind. Find an instructor who teaches striking pressure points or a good manual on the subject and begin targeting vital areas with your counter strikes. Train for accuracy as well as speed and power. Make certain that all of the strikes and kicks in your self-defense techniques are well aimed to the most effective targets. A kick to the groin will not stop a large man with pain-numbing adrenaline surging through his body, but a crushing punch to the larynx can.

**Personal thoughts on risky techniques**

Too many martial artists rely on techniques that are difficult and complicated for their self-defense. The first forms these techniques take are wrist-locks and finger-locks. Wrist-locks have become very popular in commercial and modern martial arts studios. After all, they’re flashy (like so much of the martial arts today) and skillful and show the ease with which a martial arts master can control an attacker with just tiny little movements. Unfortunately for those who’ve grown attached to them however, those tiny little movements are what are known as fine motor skills. Fine motor skills are any movements that require use of the extremities (hands and feet) in complicated motions. And, as we found out earlier, fine motor skills are the first things to go when fight or flight hormones from the sympathetic nervous system start coursing through the body. “For fine motor skills, or motor skills which have a high degree of cognitive decision making, the research indicates that optimal performance will occur during low levels of stress,” (Siddle 46) and combat is not a low stress level activity.

This doesn’t mean that wrist-locks are useless however. If no fine motor control was possible during combat, policemen and soldiers would be unable to load their weapons or handcuff uncooperative suspects. The difference is that they have practiced and trained those movements until they have become ingrained, muscle-memory reflexes. Wrist-locks can become ingrained, muscle-memory reflexes as well but only with much practice. However, the more complicated the wrist-lock or finger-lock is (I’ve seen some that involve as many as eight movements with the fingers and wrists) the less likely you’ll be able to perform it in actual combat.

There is another problem with these techniques as well. They rely on pain to force an opponent to move their arm in the direction the controller wants them to go. Often the lock can only be fully applied if the attacker cooperates by moving away from the pain. However, during combat or stressful situations pain tolerance is greatly enhanced by the adrenaline response. Attackers that are very excited or angry may not cooperate with the lock and will simply pull out or resist the pain, rendering the entire technique useless. And that does not account for those individuals who are simply born with very high pain tolerance who can easily resist small joint-locks. These people are not so rare (I have trained with several by chance) and the possibility of your attacker being one is even greater when you consider that drug use and alcohol will greatly
decrease pain sensitivity. And, as one last precaution, there are many individuals with very thick or very strong wrists that will easily be able to resist such a lock.

These same realities apply to squeezed or pressed pressure points (as opposed to striking pressure points) and make these potentially dangerous and unreliable defenses as well. Heightened pain tolerance may cause pressure points to have less of an effect on the street as they do in training and many people have a high enough normal tolerance to ignore them. The resulting pain must be extremely strong for a squeezed pressure point to be effective over the effects of the fight or flight response and the technique must work on 99% of people for it to be a reliable defense. Even then pressure points are so difficult to find on another person during a struggle - requiring fine muscle control and coordination - that I would not recommend them for self-defense training.

Hence you should be very careful when selecting wrist or finger-locks or squeezed pressure points as your self-defense techniques. They are difficult to perform under pressure and will not work for every attacker. They may not work at all when pain tolerance is heightened. There are some arm or wrist locks (for example, the simplest wrist-locks to the inside or outside) that are reasonably safe and that rely on body mechanics more than pain to take an opponent down to one side or the other. These may work well as self-defense techniques, but make sure to discover the likelihood of failure by testing techniques with training partners. Find out how easily the technique can be resisted and if it would still be effective or would put you in an awkward position should your partner simply ignore the pain.

The next and even riskier form of dangerous technique is any that involves catching a punch or hand strike, especially a straight line strike. Too many martial arts instructors like to show off flashy moves where they catch their attacker’s incoming punch and use a quick takedown. This works fine for them because they knew the attack was coming and where it would be coming. In the event of an actual surprising attack, the speed of a committed technique will prevent you from catching it by the hand or arm before or after it reaches you. A real strike simply comes too quickly to catch. Can you imagine catching a boxer’s jab by the wrist to perform your wrist-lock? You should be distrustful of any self-defense technique that teaches you to catch a punch or strike. Analyze the technique with a partner moving at full speed and without prior warning and see if it is possible you to catch their strike. It is very unlikely that you will be able to.

Walking the Path: How to practice your techniques

“...the mind remains calm while the reflexes take over. A moment’s hesitation can be fatal, so training strives towards cultivating instinct rather than intellect. Through this methodology, a good student can become combat proficient in a matter of months instead of years!”

- Jeff Finder, “Filipino Fighting Arts”

Once you’ve chosen your few, personal techniques and verified that they will work for you against a whole range of opponents (most importantly big, strong males), start practicing regularly. Once a month is not enough to ingrain self-defense techniques, twice a week is much more like it, and every day would be ideal. Practicing as often as
possible helps ensure that you will ingrain your techniques as reflexes. Begin slowly, having your partner face you and throw the attack with little force or speed. Go through all the motions of the defense, from block to finishing moves over and over. When you have those motions down well, begin adding speed and force. Then instruct your partner to attack without warning. For now, don’t let your partner try to counter, that will only be counterproductive. A real attacker will have no idea what you’re going to do. After fast, unannounced attacks, practice combining types of attacks. Your partner should not tell you which of the attacks you’ve been training for are coming next. This is a slow process and will take months to become truly proficient in defending against all the attacks. Take care to not move ahead too quickly and make sure that you are performing the whole technique properly as often as possible. The easy tendency is to believe you’ve learned it well enough or to get bored and move on to faster training when you’re not truly ready. If you start doing it poorly, slow it down. You need to learn it correctly and succeed as many times in a row as you can in order to learn it correctly.

Try to build confidence in your techniques and your abilities by succeeding as often as possible. Research shows that confidence greatly increases a student’s likelihood to select or use a technique during stress and will increase reaction time and effectiveness (Siddle 10-20). “Confidence minimizes the physiological effects of stress and places the student in a physical parameter for optimum combat performance” (Siddle 15). Don’t train when you’re unable to properly perform the technique any longer. You’ll learn the technique faster and be more proficient in it when you take it slowly and don’t move on too quickly.

Take extra caution to not introduce any improper responses into your training. You don’t want to be like the cop who handed back the gun. Don’t ingrain things you don’t want ingrained. Do not help your partner back up off the ground. It may seem like the nice thing to do, but once you’ve explained the reasons to her, she’ll understand. Take your partner down with the full technique, then strike him, apply a hold or a break, and strike him some more. When you’re sure he would be out of the fight or that he would have given up, think about it for a split second, then consciously make the decision to get back to your feet. Get up quickly and in a fighting stance, checking the area by moving your head and be ready for anything, from him or from others that might be around you. Do all of this even in practice. Ingrain good habits from the beginning. Do not forget about your surroundings once your partner has hit the ground. Follow her down immediately, but make an effort to practice being aware of your surroundings while you’re finishing her off. You don’t want be caught leaning over your attacker when his friend comes up from behind.
The Dark and Scary Road: Preparing for surprise, fear, and stress

It is of the utmost necessity to acclimatize your body to extreme fear and stress. Real attacks should be prepared for by using some special training techniques.

Unexpected attacks

The first of these training methods will help you learn to respond instinctively when you are not expecting an attack. When you feel ready, ask your partner to attack you (with control) at their leisure during classes, when you are not expecting it and without facing off. Instructors, have your students start this exercise when they are effectively defending themselves against unannounced attacks at full speed when partnered up. Start very slowly at first, just as you did when you were learning the initial movements. This will simulate to some degree the surprise and stress of a real attack and will help ingrain your technique as reflex even further. If you are feel ready enough and properly supervised I highly recommend working up to full force attacks with your partner holding nothing back.

Situational training

The second method of training is known as situational training or dynamic training. Use this and scenario role-playing to help prepare yourself or your students. Have your partner attack you as he imagines a real attacker might, with all the posturing, threatened behavior, and cusswords included. Make sure attacking partners act like they mean business. This will not only introduce you to a small measure of stress inoculation, but will help prepare you for the loud, harsh realities of an attack. Many people are not accustomed to being threatened, pushed around, or shouted at in a violent, hateful manner. Trainees need to learn how to handle these factors in order to be better able to defend themselves and keep down stress. Set up situations in a realistic manner, role-playing out common types of attacks (muggings, hate crimes, rape, etc.), attacks you’ve seen on the news, on the videos provided with the Path of Protection (discussed later) or others like those, or taken from books and stories of actual accounts. At times, take your training outside the training facility. Set up situations on street corners with a partner playing a violent thug, in a house in a party setting with an angry drunk, or in a jewelry shop with an enraged thief. Have your students or friends play the attacker and all the surrounding witnesses as realistically as possible, always making sure that someone is in charge, keeping it all safe and under control. Most importantly, have the attacker be as believable as possible to introduce the defender to what it would be like to face an opponent who is truly angry or out of hurt them.

This type of training is very important for developing confidence, learning to think under stress, and cementing in reflexes. This excerpt from Bruce Siddle’s book confirms how necessary it is;

“The benefits of dynamic training exercises include:
• The reduction in survival reaction time by providing a learning experience, where the threat and outcome are processed analytically. This learning experience allows the students to access threats and combat response more quickly in the dynamics of a real encounter.
• The training exercise gives the students a safe environment to work out the tactical aspects of a survival skill.
• If the training exercise is designed correctly, the students will have a positive experience with the survival skill. The effectiveness of the skill will increase personal confidence in managing a similar situation, resulting in lower heart rates during a field encounter" (Siddle 124-5).

It is very important to take situational or dynamic training slowly at first. The experience should be broken down to at least three practice run-throughs for each defender, with increasing intensity and speed each time. The idea is to start with something like a walk-through in slow motion and work your way up to the full enactment with realistic speed and power. It is also vital that students not be given impossible tasks or situations that are beyond their ability. A student may fail in the training for some reason, but should immediately be given praise and constructive criticism by an instructor or partner, guided through the proper reactions, and then be allowed to try again and succeed. If dynamic exercises are too difficult for the students, they will become discouraged and lose confidence in themselves, degrading their abilities instead of improving them.

Visualization

The next activity to teach your students is something they will be responsible for on their own, but is extremely effective at ingraining reflexes further into the nervous system, as well as helpful for lowering stress during actual conflicts. Students should be taught to mentally picture their techniques and go through them in their minds during practice, in dangerous situations, and at opportune times during every day. How visualization works exactly is still being debated, but it is well established that it prepares the nervous system for the visualized action, called spinal tuning (Siddle 102). If students visualize techniques when in a situation that feels dangerous or before they are about to confront someone, this preprograms their actions into their nervous system, allowing them to be initiated with faster reaction time when needed. Visualization throughout the day also works as second form of practicing. One theory suggests that it slightly activates the neurons for the muscles involved in the skill being visualized. Visualization can be even more beneficial to you, therefore, if you twitch the muscles involved slightly as you see yourself going through the action. In addition, it makes certain that the actions are fresh in your memory and all of the proper motions are well ingrained into your conscious and unconscious minds.

It is also important to visualize defending yourself in given situations. See yourself being attacked in different ways or in different escalating situations. Visualize multiple attacker scenarios and varying environments. Visualize potential cues of impending danger or attacks, visualize the response to the actual attack, and visualize a
second, backup response should your technique fail. This allows you to prepare for potential events and to see yourself reacting in possible situations. In effect it is another form of situational training; “Anxiety and the escalating heart rates occur when a student is exposed to a potential threat and is unclear on the outcome. Preparation in any form provides a student with an opportunity to think through potential threats and the proper survival response before being exposed to the threat” (Siddle 103).

Breathing

“The relationship between breath control and the ability to concentrate or focus has been recognized for centuries. Ancient philosophy and martial arts texts abound with references drawing parallels between combat performance, breath control, and the ability to focus and concentrate when exposed to survival stress” (Siddle 104). Now, with the advent of modern research, scientists studying combat and stress are able to prove its efficacy at controlling the reactions of the sympathetic nervous system. Law enforcement officers, military researchers, and survival and combat trainers are beginning to strongly emphasize the use of this ancient practice.

The basic science behind breathing is simple. As stress increases, the heart rate increases, and the body begins to breathe faster to supply the body with oxygen. However, as carbon dioxide decreases in the blood stream, the effects of the sympathetic nervous system increase, the heart rate rises further, blood vessels in the brain constrict, and less oxygen reaches the brain (Siddle 105). Consciously slowing your breathing allows you to control this process as well as lower your stress level. Breathing exercises should be practiced throughout the day, during martial arts practice, during self-defense training, and especially during stressful situations or when being attacked. Breath control should become another reflex when you feel in danger or highly stressed. It should be taught and emphasized strongly during all situational training and the importance and process of breathing should be constantly reiterated by instructors.

“Once students have learned the symptoms associated with survival stress, (awareness of increased heart rate, rapid breathing, abnormal sweating, and uncontrollable muscle tremors), students will know they are outside their survival performance zone and initiate controlled breathing exercises” (Siddle 106).

There are several methods of controlled breathing, but they all involve something like this; practice this now as you read and continue to practice it in all of your training. Take a deep breath by expanding the abdomen and breathing from the belly (not the lungs). Your inhalation should last for a slow count of three (about three or four seconds). Hold your breath in for a slow count of three. Now, exhale for a slow count of three by pulling the abdomen in. Hold your lungs empty for a slow count of three. Now, begin again by inhaling for three counts. As you breathe, allow yourself to become calm and your muscles to relax; begin to associate this feeling with your breathing pattern. Practice this often. Next time you are feeling nervous or stressed, breathe in this manner and you will feel your body beginning to relax and your heart rate slowing.
These two exercises, visualization and breath control, along with preparing for stress through role-playing and situational training will greatly enhance your ability to control your adrenaline and heart rate in a stressful situation, thereby enabling you to stay calmer and utilize your defenses effectively (instead of going wild or freezing from fear). However, since you always know in the back of your mind that your training partners and fellow students would never actually kill you or hurt you purposely, you may never experience levels of stress equal to the real thing. All you can rationally do is practice these techniques fully, so that if you are faced with combat stress you will be as calm as possible. Lt. Col Grossman recommends in *On Combat* that you let attack dogs bite you (with the proper equipment and supervision) to condition the mind and body to the true stress of actual danger. “A true, deranged, killing rage can only be experienced and inoculated against in this manner, since trainees always know that a rational trainer will not intentionally commit an act that will seriously injure them. But an attack dog will, quite happily” (Grossman 38). This may seem a little extreme, but all I can say is, do whatever you feel is necessary (with the exception of starting fights) to prepare yourself as best you can.

**How to utilize sparring and kata properly**

Sparring and kata can be beneficial for self-defense training if done in particular ways. Sparring is one of the best tools to help train your reflexes and timing to improve your self-defense. It can help you learn to place yourself properly to accomplish your techniques. Use sparring wisely by working on certain attributes, techniques, and abilities with your partner instead of always free-sparring. Train your ability to step inside to block and counter or to avoid and immediately maneuver to the most advantageous position according to your appropriate techniques. Train in jamming techniques and countering during your block, or even before your partner strikes (what Bruce Lee called the stop-hit). Integrate your self-defense techniques into sparring.

Remember that proper sparring should consist of mixed martial arts style, no-holds-barred sessions, always lasting for varying lengths of rounds; *don’t train yourself to quit after a certain length of time*. You should not count points, but you should spar as boxers fight, continuously exchanging blows. There should be few actual rules and those should exist solely for safety, not stylism. Only potentially deadly or debilitating techniques should be banned and dangerous targets (throat, spine, spleen and kidneys) should be off limits. Train only with partners with good control and wear protective equipment so that common target areas such as the groin and nose can be legal. With this form of practice it should be fairly easy to start performing your takedowns and self-techniques during sparring. Remember though, that your opponents in sparring will begin to suspect your techniques as no street attacker could. Don’t abandon your techniques because they stop working in sparring, try to make them work again by doing them faster or learning subtle ways to neutralize your opponent’s counters. Just make sure that those subtle techniques don’t degrade your technique if your attacker does not counter.

Importantly, begin to make your basic sparring responses synonymous with your self-defense techniques. When your sparring partner throws a hook punch at you, you
should block as if you were working on your self-defense for a hook, using the same block that begins that technique. Begin to eliminate all of the other blocks and responses you might have used for sparring attacks. If you minimize your blocks and responses to your self-defense blocks, not only will you be training self-defense when you spar, but your sparring will become faster and more instinctive. On the other side of the coin, when choosing self-defense techniques, try to use blocks and responses that would feel natural in sparring.

Here’s a personal example of these two concepts. I noticed that my first and most common response to a straight punch in sparring would be to step to the outside and block with my back hand while striking with my front hand. Without having ever consciously working on that defense, I noticed that it had become an instinctive reaction. Thus, when I chose a self-defense technique for a straight punch, I made sure to pick one that opened with the same step, block, and counter (in fact, I developed my own technique by combining these elements with a common take-down). That technique was easier to learn and felt more natural because it derived from my already developed reaction. Now, when sparring, I make sure that I block straight techniques with the same response, and if I catch myself blocking in another way, I work on eliminating that reaction. Practicing in this way can make your sparring much more effective. For instance, now when I block in the above way quickly enough, I can take my opponent down using my full self-defense technique. In another example, if you were to practice one block and a trap for kicks instead of using a different block each time, you’ll soon be able to trap and take down your opponent when she kicks instead of merely stopping or avoiding it.

Use context and situational training in sparring as well. Spar with objects in the room (tables, chairs), in actual furnished rooms (homes, bars, gyms), in a corner, in alleyways, outside, or with groups of people close together (rings of people around you or with everyone sparring as if in a bar fight). Spar with street clothes on, with preplanned attacks, with practice weapons, etc. With this type of sparring, always try to keep responses realistic and similar to your self-defense techniques. Never, never practice bouncing around and kicking at your opponent in situational training. Use foot sweeps, takedowns, and practice your breaks. Remember, train as realistically as possible without hurting your partners.

As far as kata, you should feel free to take your self-defense techniques from them, as long as they are truly applicable. Keep in mind that many classical techniques are no longer applicable in today’s world. Pay close attention to the historical bunkai for the movements and assess their use today with testing and practice. Most techniques taken from kata will be incomplete, and you’ll need to add blocks or evasions and finishing techniques. But at the same time, having practiced these techniques in kata before and after you start self-defense training will help cement them into your muscle memory and make them easier to perform. Use kata to develop your short-term endurance, speed, and striking power. But, keep in mind that kata movements will never fit the actual defense technique exactly. You must ingrain in your mind the difference between the two and not involuntarily move on with the kata during self-defense. You must train with actual people more than you train in kata. Remember that kata and sparring are supplementary to self-defense training; they are tools to help you train your fighting attributes, not combat effective techniques.
Looking Down the Path: an example of proper training

"Three years of discipline made Lancelot, not a merry heart and a capacity for singing tirra-lirra."

 - T.H. White, The Once and Future King

Now, let us put it all together and look at what your proper self-defense training should be like:

Having had a suitable time learning basic techniques (about a year or so) your teacher tells you that you will be starting self-defense soon and that you will be starting with two common attacks. She shows you and others at your level a large number of defenses for those attacks, explaining their individual pros and cons and whether they work for certain people or body types. Then she directs you to a place where you can see a whole list of those techniques and others in picture form (like the Path of Protection project). You are given a couple of class periods to work through a number of techniques, but you are told that soon you will need to have chosen one specific defense technique for each type of attack, and that they should be as similar as possible. You come in for class one night and before you tire yourself out with basics, kata, or sparring, you begin training your technique. It’s important to work on training these skills while you’re still fresh. I believe that it is possible to develop endurance in these skills (and that it is important, for even though most attacks only last a few minutes, the physical toll of the fight or flight response makes the need for physical stamina much stronger) but only by extending workout periods without ever training to the point that you grow too tired to perform them.

"Do not practice finely skilled movement after you are tired, for you will begin to substitute gross motions for finer ones and generalized efforts for specific ones. Remember, wrong movements tend to supervene and the athlete’s progress is set back. Thus, the athlete practices fine skills only while he is fresh. When he becomes fatigued, he shifts to tasks employing gross movements designed principally to develop endurance" (Lee 45).

You are partnered up and the instructor designates attackers and defenders. You then begin slowly working through the attack and the defense in all of its parts (breaking it down at first to learn each part individually) from the block all the way to the finishing moves and quickly standing up. You rotate partners and eventually attack and defend against everyone else in your group. They you break for the rest of class. Next class period, same thing, until eventually your defense comes instantaneously and precisely, without conscious thought. Your instructor has you then defend against both attacks without knowing which one is coming, or exactly when it will come. She makes sure you vary the height, speed, and power of your attacks. Eventually you are told to learn new techniques for new attacks and, as time progresses, these defense become just as reflexive as those before. Still, you practice slowly at first, then work up to full speed and power,
always with the same defense technique. Still, you practice just that technique at first, and then begin shuffling the attacks. Your technique may be different then everyone else’s, but the instructor dissuades you from learning other’s defenses or teaching yours to them. You are told to incorporate your techniques into your sparring and even into kata. Your instructor may even have you create a kata made up of your techniques.

Eventually, after at least a year, when you have a defense well learned for every type of attack, you begin class by having a partner attack you in any way they desire without warning and you respond immediately to that attack with the proper defense. At about the same time, you begin situational training against partners who are role-playing as angry, violent, threatening, or out of control. You train in dark alleys and with surprise attacks from behind. You have a partner who attacks you suddenly and at random during class or throughout the day. Your instructor has you do multiple person self-defense and you learn to perform your techniques while simultaneously scanning the environment and watching for new attackers. Eventually you learn weapons defenses and disarms that are as similar as possible to your unarmed defenses. You will continue to practice the same techniques for the rest of your life (or until your body changes so much that your techniques must change too). With this proper training to develop reflex reactions to appropriate stimuli, you finally know that when an attack happens, you don’t have to be ready; your body will act all by itself.

Getting Fit for the Journey: Physical fitness and self-defense

Training for self-defense goes far beyond practicing the techniques and movements. A martial artist must have the physical fitness to perform under pressure. Bruce Lee was known for his many radical ideas about combat, but one of his most controversial pronouncements was that the majority of martial arts teachers and so called masters did not have the physical capability to use their much practiced technical skills. Lee criticized martial artists who had good techniques but who were too overweight or out of shape to move their bodies or last out a fight. Aside from the power and speed required to execute a technique and the strength and endurance required to last out a fight when techniques fail, there is an even graver concern. As we observed earlier, in a stressful situation, your heart rate spikes dramatically. If the body is not able to fight the effects of adrenaline with good physical fitness, the heart rate will quickly accelerate further and panic induced behavior (condition black) will result. Furthermore, if the body is not properly conditioned to deal with this hormone induced state, injury can occur. For those who are in poor physical shape or who have a previous condition, it is not impossible that an adrenaline rush may cause a heart attack. Although physical training is beyond the scope of this work, it must be one of your top priorities. You must take care to train hard and smart, working out with the right training methods so as to improve yourself, not hurt yourself. As a quick example, take care not to train long distance endurance, or use typical aerobic exercise to lose weight. This training will only build your slow-twitch muscle fibers, increasing your long term endurance but allowing your fast-twitch muscle fibers to atrophy. This decreases your speed and power. If you need more information on proper training for the martial arts and self-defense, please look up the remarkable books of Pavel Tsatsouline or visit www.dragondoor.com.
About the Technique Collection

The Path of Protection project was created to help you identify and choose self-defense techniques that will work for you. Its purpose is to provide you with a large range of techniques from different styles and with different strength and power requirements, allowing you to take those techniques to a qualified instructor to begin learning and practicing them. The size of the technique collection makes it possible for everyone to find techniques that work for them and makes it easier to learn and understand the basic principles underlying the techniques. But while seeing all of the different ways of responding to the many types of attacks is fascinating and fun, you must remember to never attempt to learn or practice them all. As the law of the land says, take only what you need to survive. If the time comes when these techniques are needed, martial artists can not afford to have a flood of memorized techniques cloud their minds; responses must be instantaneous and reflexive.

Under the Application section you’ll find three categories, Unarmed Defenses vs. Armed Attacks, Armed Defenses vs. Armed Attacks, and Unarmed Defenses vs. Unarmed Attacks. While the first two categories currently contain some techniques, the project thus far has concentrated on Unarmed Attacks and that is where you'll find the majority of techniques. More will be added to the Armed Attacks and Armed Defenses categories as this project expands in the future.

The Unarmed techniques for defending against Unarmed Attacks have been divided into three basic categories; defenses against holds or grabs, defenses against kicks, and defenses against hand strikes. Since each type of hold or grab is applied to a certain place, techniques for those attacks are simply listed in the order they were collected with extra comments within the attack. Kicks and strikes have specific areas of the body they can be directed against and thus the techniques are listed according to the target areas they can be used to defend. The target areas have been broken down into:

**High (H)** – for the head and shoulders region, attacks to this area can be blocked with a high or upwards block.

**Middle (M)** – the area below the shoulders to about the navel, attacks here can be blocked with an inward middle block

**Upper Legs (U)** – Mainly covers the groin and femoral nerve region to the knees, attacks can be blocked using a low block.

**Low Legs (L)** – Below the knees, attacks here cannot be blocked easily with the hands and must be evaded or blocked with the legs.

For example; a high block with a hip throw will not work to stop a straight punch to the groin, you must find a technique that includes the Upper Legs in its target areas. Under each attack type you can read more about the purpose and target areas of each attack.
Choose one technique for type of strike and hold. For strikes, make sure you have covered all of the target areas of the attack. Read about the Access file database and use it choose techniques that can be applied to multiple types of attacks and to the greatest number of target areas. Print off your chosen techniques or ones that you would like to explore further and bring them to a qualified martial arts instructor with experience in multiple styles. Even if your instructor doesn’t know the technique he may understand its workings or be able to help you work through it. If not, try to find an instructor from a style that the technique may have originated in to explain its workings and teach it to you. Experiment with the techniques until you identify the ones that are right for you and that work well against larger, stronger opponents. Then, practice those and those alone, on both sides: of the body and in many different situations, until all of your techniques become reflexes. Remember, no one can learn self-defense from knowledge or pictures alone, you must train hard!

About the Path of Protection Access File

The Path of Protection was designed to be viewed in two ways. Although the website interface allows for an easy, visual way of browsing the techniques, the Microsoft Access Database file is probably the best way to find the most useful techniques for a desired application. It was designed with two purposes in mind.

1. Martial arts instructors can easily view all the techniques for a certain type of attack or search for certain applications or qualities. Using this, an instructor can view and teach all of the defenses for a specific type of attack, from a certain style, for a certain target area, etc.

2. Even more importantly, trainees can organize and view the techniques by all of the types of attacks and target areas to which they apply. Thus, martial artists can use the file to choose the most versatile and useful techniques, making the number of techniques they have to memorize and practice as few as possible.

Using the Access file

Upon opening the Access file, the Access Database view pops up. Double-click on the table named “The Path of Protection – Unarmed vs Unarmed – Strikes” to open it and view all of the techniques for defending against unarmed strikes and pushes with your empty hands. A similar table is provided for the grabs and holds. These tables present several columns of information. Firstly, the column labeled “Technique Name” identifies the technique by the type of attack it defends against. Click on the link “Open” in the column to the left to view the technique directly.

The columns to the right list other types of attacks to which this technique can be applied. You should find this useful as you can now search the entire table for the code of a given type of attack and find every technique that can be used to defend against it in the database.

In the “Strikes” table, the columns to the right list the target areas a technique can cover. With this you can easily identify techniques that apply to the most target areas and
are thus more useful. To do this, simply scroll down the list to the type of attack you wish to defend against (to identify attacks, read “About the Naming of the Techniques” below). Techniques for a given attack will be listed together and ordered by the numbers in their names. (If techniques are not listed in alphabetical order, click on the column heading for “Technique Name” and then hit the “sort ascending” button on the utility bar at the top of Access.)

Find a technique that covers the target area you want and select the cell (for example, select a cell that says “High” in the column “Target Area 1”), then hit the “filter by selection” button on the utility bar. Now, only techniques that apply to the High target area are selected. You can do the same for the next target area in order to select those that apply to a certain number of areas. In the same way, you can filter out techniques that come from a certain style or have a known name. To restore the view to all the techniques, just hit the “Remove Filter” button on the utility bar.

To find all of the techniques that will apply to a certain type of attack, use the same “filter by selection” button on the desired attack code in the “Alternate Techniques” column.

About the naming of the techniques

All of the techniques found within The Path of Protection have been named with an identifying code so that they can easily be searched and identified. Each technique was named according to the first type of attack that it was designed to defend against and given a number in the order it was collected. Each type of technique has been given a three letter alphabetical code that corresponds with the actual name of the attack it applies to. To view these codes and read about the types of attack they stand for, open the table titled “Technique Naming Codes” from the main Access database view. The code is followed by an underscore and then the number. For example; the name GDH_001 signifies the first technique that can defend against Double Handed Grabs. Should you desire to look at the source pictures on the CD, the numbers are followed by a letter that represents the order of the photos.

About the Path of Protection Videos

In this day, multimedia and video cameras give us a new way to prepare for real attacks. Before the all-invasive television shows like Real-T.V. (like them or not) and the all seeing video camera many people could go though life never witnessing a real attack beyond school yard brawls. We had no way of ever seeing a fight unless we were unfortunate enough to be present when one took place (and not be a part of it). Now, however, actual fights and attacks are caught on camera and shown world-wide every day. While I personally dislike the concept of people getting entertainment from watching other’s misfortunes, in the case of combat, these videos do have a useful purpose. One of the best things you can do to better prepare yourself for the reality of combat is to watch those video clips of actual attacks. There are numerous shows on television (Real T.V., Cops, etc.) and several websites, such as www.ebaumsworld.com
where you can find such videos. To make it easier to find some and to help explain what I mean, some have been provided for you on The Path of Protection project. Watch these videos and others like them and observe such things as what attacks are most commonly used, why the problems started in the first place, what defenses did or didn’t work, how the attack was initiated, what mood, comments, or behavior immediately preceded the attacks, etc. Notice the differences between fights and try to reason out the differences. Notice how long the fight lasted, what worked or did not work to finally stop the attacker. You will notice, for instance, that attacks are usually predictable by the mood of those involved, that attackers are seldom trained fighters, that some fighters are knocked cold in a single punch and others can take a lot of punishment. You will also notice that pepper spray and mace are almost completely useless. These videos are not pretty and they are far from being uplifting examples of human character, but they can help you understand combat and prepare mentally for the reality and stresses involved in a self-defense situation.
The End of the Road and the Beginning of Your Journey

"Willing is not enough; we must do. Knowing is not enough; we must apply."

- Bruce Lee, The Tao of Jeet Kune Do

Now that you have read this work, you have begun to understand the realities of combat and the type and amount of training you must undertake to prepare for defending yourself. Please enjoy the technique compilation project, but more importantly, use it wisely. Take only what you need from it. Train hard and train smart. Practice often, constantly refine your training, and be always ready. That is the road of a warrior; that is the path of protection.
Works Cited


