



SELF DEFENSE TUTORIALS

5 MOST IMPORTANT SELF DEFENSE LESSONS FROM JIU-JITSU

Why You Need a Basic Knowledge of Grappling

Of course there's more to self defense than grappling, but at the same time if you're interested in self defense in the modern age then you absolutely must have a basic understanding of the ground game.

In addition to grappling you *also* need to understand striking ranges, the basics of weaponry and weapons defense, situational awareness, self defense strategies, and the psychology of confrontation (all of which we'll discuss in other articles, tips and tutorials).

But those other areas don't give you a free pass to ignore the grappling range; in fact ignoring this range is incredibly dangerous.

For one thing, grappling just happens.

Consider boxers...

Nobody hits harder and is more motivated to knock their opponent the hell out than a boxer – their livelihood depends on getting the big KO.

But what do boxers do when they become fatigued or just tired of getting punched in the head?

When they feel they're getting the worse of an exchange they close the distance and clinch with their opponents.

Clinching is a form of grappling, and if you let the two boxers hang onto each other long enough then one or both of them would likely end up falling to the ground (and that's why the referees have to rush in and break up the clinch).



Even boxers clinch and grapple when they get tired of getting hit...

Also a TON of people train in jiu-jitsu and MMA these days. That means that you're fairly likely to run into someone who's default strategy is to shoot a double leg takedown, pass the guard, and then rain down punches onto your face from the mount is fairly high.

In addition, you can be assured that every single musclebound idiot and wannabe tough guy watches the UFC (or plays MMA video games) even if they don't actually train formally in MMA. Thanks to the 'education' they receive watching professional fighters compete they've likely absorbed some kind of basic idea about how to clinch and grapple.

The idea that pretty much *everyone* has some kind or rudimentary ground game nowadays was made crystal clear to me a few years ago.

I was driving through a rough part of town when a verbal confrontation between two homeless guys escalated into a brawl...

Within a few seconds of the fight starting one of the homeless guys had slapped a rough guillotine choke on the other guy, sat back and pulled his opponent into his guard, and was trying to choke him out.

The cops came and broke up the fight fairly quickly, but the lesson was plain...



If some homeless drug addict, who almost certainly doesn't train at an MMA gym or jiu-jitsu gym, has incorporated the basics of jiu-jitsu into his street fighting repertoire then grappling has penetrated public consciousness so thoroughly that you simply can't stick your head in the sand anymore.

You **NEED** to learn the basics of grappling, because even if you don't want to wrestle around in a streetfight the best way to counter something is to have a decent understanding of it.

So let's go over 5 quick lessons that you can incorporate into your training right now...

LESSON 1: Proximity, Panic and Claustrophobia

In this first of 5 videos I break down the single most important reason for incorporating at least a little bit of grappling into your training.

And no, it doesn't have anything to do with any specific technique or move...

Click play on the video below or scroll down for a text and photo summary of what's discussed in the video.



Imagine if you and I were having a conversation...

We'd be probably be chatting while standing two or three feet apart facing each other. This is roughly the conversational range, and it's also similar to the standard fistfight range.

In a fight at this range we may be worried about getting knocked out, but we're not intrinsically freaked out by the range itself. It's a standard distance at which two human beings in this society interact...



But now imagine that, as we're talking, I come up to you belly to belly and continue to chat. That would be weird, wouldn't it?

In fact we spend very little time at this super-close range, which makes it uncomfortable and even panic inducing for most people.



It's strange to be this close to another human being, and unless we've trained in some form of grappling then we're just not used to it.

I've wrestled with many bodybuilders and tough guys who absolutely lost their minds when the distance was closed.

(To me it seems that the bigger the guy the more he freaks out when you get him on the bottom and smother him a bit – they're just not used to that).

So range itself can be a weapon that your opponent can use against you.

Claustrophobia – it's *especially* important.

Unless you desensitise yourself to close range and in-your-face proximity then you'll be at a huge disadvantage.

Forget about any technical grappling moves – if you're freaking out then you'll burn through all your energy reserves and end up exhausted and unable to think in no time.

And the *only* way to desensitise yourself to this range is to do some grappling. You don't need to get your jiu-jitsu black belt – that's for specialists only – but spending a few months on your ground game, becoming comfortable at this range and developing some good basic technical options from this range is super important.

Train some sort of grappling because...



ONLY Experience at this Range Will Prevent Panic and Allow You to Respond Effectively If You End Up Here in a Fight!

LESSON 2: Escaping the Mount

Back in the day fights in the playground would almost always end with one kid sitting on the other kid's chest, punching and slapping him until the guy on the bottom said 'Uncle' (or until the teachers bodily hauled both combatants to their feet).

Fast forward into the 20th century and you see much the same thing in the UFC.

When you see one fighter mounted on another, raining down punches and elbows then more often than not the end is near. The guy on top has gravity and mechanical advantage on his side and can hit MUCH harder downwards than the other guy can hit upwards.

(Also forget about escaping with an elbow-to-the-groin, an eye-gouge or biting his belly; in a real fight he'll be so hyped up that a pain-based escape probably won't work and might even give him ideas about what to do to you.)

The guy on the bottom is either going to get knocked out, tap out, or turn to his belly and give up his neck for the rear naked choke.

Having a reliable, structural way to escape from the mount is NOT optional in today's combat environment. You simply have to know how to do it.



There's more than one way to escape from this position, but the standard 'upa' or 'bridge and roll' technique from BJJ is probably the best place to start.

Here's a quick breakdown of steps to do this move, but you should also watch the video above for more details..

1. You're on the bottom of mount. Bring your feet in close to your butt and keep your hands high to protect your face. Your elbows are pushing down against his thighs
2. Bridge straight up as high as you can to knock his weight forward and get him to plant his hands on the ground
3. Bring both hands up above his arm and clasp your palms together in a Muay Thai clinch position
4. Pull his arm down so that his hand is no longer on the ground. Pin it tight against your chest.
5. Step your foot over his leg on the same side as his arm is trapped
6. Bridge your hips as high as you can and then – at the apex of your bridge – roll to the side
7. Come to the top and begin to establish good posture in his closed guard

The basic concept here is to block off one side of his body (his left arm and his left leg, for example) so that he can't base out on that side. Then to bridge really high to disrupt his contact with the ground

In addition to escaping the position it also ties up one of your opponent's arms and brings his weight forward which makes it harder for him to hit you effectively. So it's a very street-applicable technique.

Yes, this is a basic technique, but it's so powerful that I continue to use it even at black belt level. And you also see



it a lot in MMA, where it is a tried and true method of getting out of the bottom of mount when punches are flying.

The bridge and roll technique also sets up other, more advanced escapes; even if your opponent manages to block this particular technique then his reaction may just give you the opening to escape using a second, follow-up technique.

Learn this technique and then go drill it with a training partner. It may just save your bacon when you're trapped in one of the very worst positions on the street!

LESSON 3: The Street Guard

If you get pushed or knocked down to the ground then you need to 'give him your legs' right away.

It's very tempting to try and stand up right away, but that's a terrible idea!

If you just turn and come onto your hands and knees to stand up then it's hard to keep an eye on what's happening and you'll probably get kicked in the ribs or the head.

Even worse, it exposes your back and your neck to your opponent to your opponent, and if he sinks a choke on you then it's all over...

So before you get back to your feet first stabilise the situation by using the guard. This keeps him where you can see him and also allows you to defend against most attacks.



The guard is when you're on the bottom using your legs to defend yourself. Depending on the variation your legs could be closed around his back (the 'closed guard'), hooking and pushing on his body and limbs (the 'open guard') or just trapping one of his legs (the 'half guard').

Regardless of the variation, the guard is the *only* position on the bottom on the bottom where you're not losing. In any other bottom position you're bearing the full weight of your opponent, have far fewer offensive options, and are much more likely to take a beating if he decides to hit you.

Furthermore, in a street self-defence context the bottom of your shoes is where most people keep their 'armour'.

First of all your feet are pretty tough, and secondly you've typically got 1/2" to 1" of leather, foam and rubber on the bottom of your feet because you wear shoes. This will allow you a pretty decent shot at stopping even a stick or a knife.

Keep your legs pointed at your opponent and if he comes close then kick him in the groin or shin. Even if this doesn't actually damage your opponent then it'll still create a structural element between you and him that keeps him out of range and away from your most vulnerable targets.

Many opponents will try to run around your legs. The further away he is the more time you have to defend against that: typically you'll follow his circling with either a tank turret motion, or with a back and forward rocking motion

By staying on your back and defending from there you're following the 'survive first, win later' principle of self defense.

In the next lesson we'll cover how to get to your feet safely...



LESSON 4: The Technical Standup

Alright, so you're on the ground and want to get back to your feet; good plan!

However knowing the right way to stand back up in a fight is important. Let's look at how exactly to do that...



As we discussed in Lesson 3 on the Street Guard, most people just try to bring their feet under them like getting up off a towel spread out on the beach, or – even worse – they get onto their hands and knees and try to stand up that way.

Unfortunately both of those methods create a fantastic opportunity for your opponent to knock your teeth down your throat with a well-timed kick.

To get back to your feet safely from the ground you need to

- First keep yourself safe on the ground by giving your opponent your legs (i.e. establish the guard)
- Create some distance between you and your opponent with kicks to the shin and
- Stand up in a way that is both quick and doesn't compromise your balance



There is a way to accomplish these three goals and get safely back to your feet: it's called 'The Technical Standup.'

1. Start flat on your back with your hands up using the open street guard
2. Lash out with either foot at his shins and groin to encourage him to move back
3. When your opponent finally moves out of kicking range then it's time to go to the next step
4. Keeping one hand in front of your face for protection come up onto one elbow. One leg is bent and posting on the ground for base
5. When it's safe to do so sit up, keeping your arm in front of your face
6. If your opponent is crowding you again then lash out at his legs with the leg that *isn't* posting. Your hips can travel forwards while doing this, adding an extra foot or so to your striking range (watch the video above to really understand this point).
7. Keep on kicking at your opponent's shins until he backs up out of range. When you can no longer touch him with your foot then it means that you have enough distance to stand up safely, so proceed to the next step
8. Using your posting leg and your hand on the ground start retracting the kicking leg underneath your body
9. Bring the kicking leg way back, past your body so that you've got a wide, solid base to stand up with
10. Take an extra half step backwards as you straighten up into your fighting stance.

If at any point your opponent rushes in at you, or you feel unstable or unsafe, you can simply bail back to your street guard. Roll onto your back, bring your feet up to protect your body, and then start the whole process over again.

Better to take a few additional few seconds retreat, protect yourself and then stand up safely and in good base rather than getting KO'd by a big soccer kick to the noggin, right?

Speaking of standing up in base, a very common mistake people make is standing up with both feet together (instead of in a nice, wide, stable stance).



If you shortcut the standup motion and put both your feet beside each other then you will be extremely off-balance and out of position. Remember: you're not going to actually stand up until he's backed up and given you space, so you should have enough space and time to do this part of the technique properly.



LESSON 5: A Headlock Defense That Works Against Stronger People

The final lesson in this mini-course takes us back to the schoolyard and the standard bully's headlock.

Under stress the schoolyard is exactly where people revert to. Its very instinctive for people in a fight to grab onto the head – it's a great big handle after all. Even your basic untrained headlock can result in you getting manhandled, punched, or thrown to the ground in a very disadvantageous position.

And if that one move is all that your opponent has going for him he will hold onto your head with dogged determination. Escaping it without technique can then become quite a struggle...

A lot of self defense 'experts' will tell you its easy to escape the headlock using strikes, bites, pinches, eye gouges, slaps and stomps.

It's easy to target and land those strikes against a compliant training partner, but try being precise in your targeting when someone has you by the head and is rag-dolling you all over the parking lot...

Also, even if you manage to land a few of those killer blows the sad reality of street combat is that someone hopped up on adrenaline and other manmade drugs may not feel *any* of those strikes.

(It's a long story, but I once punched a meth addict in the middle of a burglary full force in the groin. He was old and weak; I was younger, heavier, stronger, and very good at striking but the groin shot didn't phase him at all. This illustrates the problems with relying on the magic groin strike as the be-all-and-end-all of street combatives!)

You've got to have at least one structural answer to the headlock, and in the video below I'll show you exactly what to do...



Getting out of a standing headlock when punches are flying is a four step process...

1. Stabilise the standing position so you don't get thrown around and block the punching arm
2. Take the fight to the ground on your terms
3. Use proper structure and positioning to break the grip on your head
4. Retaliate with an armlock, strikes, kicks or simply flee

Let's look at those steps one by one...

Headlock Defense

Part 1 – Stabilising the Position and Blocking Punches

First things first... You DON'T want your opponent to be able to toss you around and rag doll you, and you don't want him to take the fight to the ground on your terms.

And it would also be nice if he didn't blacken your eyes, break your nose, and remove your teeth with his punches.



If your feet are in line with your opponent then he can throw you around at will.

Therefore the first step is to get your feet perpendicular to his: you want the imaginary line connecting your feet to form the letter 'T' with the imaginary line connecting his feet.

To do this simply take a big semi-circular step around to the front while bending your legs and dropping your weight.

The combination of settling your weight down and forming a 'T' with your legs will make you much more stable and much resistant to being bullied all over the place.

The next thing you've got to do is control his FAR arm (the arm that's holding your head is controlling you but won't do any real damage on its own).

Reach for his far arm with both hands. You can bearhug it to his body, or you can come behind his body and control his forearm through the crook of his arm – it doesn't matter. Just secure that arm so it can't punch you in the head!



Headlock Defense

Part 2 – Taking the Fight Down to the Ground on Your Terms

The next step in this particular technique is to take it to the ground.

If you can get the fight to the ground on your terms then you'll end up on top.

Once you're on top you'll be able to use weight, superior leverage, and both arms to gradually and safely work your way out of the headlock.

The takedown is an easy 4 step process: Step, Drop, Roll, and Stop (kind of like the fire department's Stop, Drop and Roll, just in a different order and with an extra step).

STEP. The first thing you're going to do is keep the grip on his far arm, but now take a big step with your forward leg. Try to bring it as close as you can to your opponent's far foot.

DROP. Then you're going to drop your weight down, almost as if you're sitting down on your own heel. One of your legs will be straight, the other will be bent.

ROLL: Keep pulling on his far arm and roll him over top of you. This is a lot easier to do than it looks because you've developed a lot of momentum in the first two steps.

STOP. Follow your opponent and get to the top

This isn't a particularly difficult technique, and you can do it on someone much larger than you.

For an advanced pro tip try this with your training partner... When you're in the headlock try to straighten up; almost everybody will bully you back down. Then try straightening up a second time and as he repeats himself THEN do the step, drop and roll.



Headlock Defense

Part 3 – Breaking the Headlock Grip

So now you've got the fight to the ground and are finally in a biomechanically advantageous position to break his headlock.

Here's what we're going to do...

You're on top, but people really don't like letting go of their only handle.

And in a fight it's almost 100% certain what they're going to do next...

They're going to try and roll you over so you end up on the bottom.

This isn't the end of the world – there are still techniques you can use to get of the bottom headlock position, but – simply put – they are harder to pull off and you're going to suffer a lot more.

You're on top and you want to stay there, which is why you have to be ready with your counter!

As soon as you feel him pulling you forward and down reach forward and spread your arms out in front of you (the 'Superman'). Base off the ground and *refuse* to go over.

If necessary you can also sprawl your legs out backwards at the same time, which makes you even heavier and harder to roll.

When he gets tired of trying to bulldog you over pull him back onto his side. Use your bottom hand to push his legs down slightly.

Swing your bottom leg over his belly and move your top knee up behind his head.

This is known as the 'technical mount' or '3 point mount' position; it's both stable for you and very dangerous for your opponent.

To break the actual grip place your forearm across his jawline and grab your own forearm. Your arms in this position form a 'frame' which means that your skeleton is doing all the work and you actually exert very little muscular energy in this position.

Now your forearm to apply a 'sawing' his jaw, back and forth, back and forth...

It's a beautiful thing: the harder he holds on to your head, the more pressure comes down onto his face!

When he lets go lift your head up and keep control of his arm – he's now in a VERY bad position.



Part 4 – Retaliation or Running Away

At this point you're on top and he's in a terrible position! What you do next is up to you...

Depending on the context (what are the legalities involved, are there more attackers coming, do you have someone else to protect, etc.) you may want to punish him with strikes, move into an armbar to get a more powerful 'negotiation position', or disengage, get up, and run.



Striking from technical mount is pretty simple: you've got gravity, biomechanics and reach on your side. You can land punches, elbows, slaps and hammerfists equally well and it's very hard for him to do anything about it.

The traditional jiu-jitsu answer to this situation would be moving into the armbar, but in a self defense situation it definitely wouldn't be my first choice.

First of all, you could screw up the submission and your opponent could get out. Typically when this happens you end up in your guard and he ends up on top...

It's NEVER a good idea to trade the top position for the bottom position in a fight.

Secondly, high pain tolerance or pain-numbing drugs could make the submission not work even if you break

Finally there's always the danger of your opponent to biting you, stab you, or entangle you long enough for his buddies to arrive.

That being said, the armbar can be a good negotiation position (*'HEY, I'm ONLY going to stop hurting your arm if you NEVER bother me about dating your sister again'*).

The armbar can also be used with an intent to damage or break a limb. To do this takes a LOT of force – quite a bit more than what it takes to get someone to simply tap out.

In the final analysis, every situation is different, the armbar might be the best option under certain conditions, and so I leave the choice to you.

(It's worth mentioning that while BJJ has the superior training methodology to develop your armbars, many Indonesian and Filipino martial arts have arm-bars too – they just tend to apply them only with the intent to break the limb, not to submit their enemies. So ideally you might take the training methodology of one system – BJJ – and apply it using the tactical and strategic twists provided by the Filipino and Indonesian systems.)

To apply the armbar from technical mount keep control over his arm with your bottom arm and push his head down into the pavement with your top arm.

Now lean forward and swing your top leg over his head.

The classic beginner's error in this step is to fall back and only then bring the leg over the head. The correct sequence is leg over head first, and only then fall back!

Now hug his arm to your chest, bring your hips close to his head, point his thumb down towards his legs or up towards the sky, and then bridge your hips up to apply the lock and/or break the joint.

If instead of staying on the ground you decide it's best to disengage and run away, that's easy to do here as well.

First control both his wrists so he can't grab you or otherwise entangle you, then stand up, step behind him, and turn and run like hell.



SUMMARY

Awareness is the most important thing

Train grappling seriously for at least 3 months to desensitise yourself to the contact and become comfortable with this range.

Grappling is not the only answer to self defense situation, but circumstances beyond your control can definitely make it part of the question (i.e. it could be forced upon you, in which case you'd better know how to deal with it).

Always remember: the best way to learn to deal with certain style of attack is to learn a little bit about that style yourself. And the best way, really the only way, of learning is by doing.