The Martial Arts shown in this book are of a physically challenging nature, so care must be taken to ensure proper supervision whilst training. Although every effort has been made in the production of this book to create a safe and enjoyable method of focus mitt training, neither the author nor the publisher accept responsibility for any damage, injury or loss sustained as a result of the use of this material. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, electrostatic, magnetic tape, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise without prior written permission from the author.

ISBN: 978-1-62141-997-6
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have to thank my Mum first. Without her lifelong support and belief I wouldn’t be doing what I love everyday. When I was a teenager I spent all my free time training in and reading about Martial Arts and my mum never pressured me to go in a different direction or look for a real job. She supported me after I left school to follow my dreams, allowing me to live in her house whilst I trained and slept for 5 years and found my calling in life. Thanks Mum. Love you.

Next I need to thank Anton St James my coach, mentor and friend for 20 years. As a gangly 17 year old I turned up at his gym and he welcomed me, supported me and helped me develop into the Martial Artist I am today. He was always generous and kind and invested his time and energy in me for over a decade free of charge. He is my role model of what it is to be a true Martial Artist and gentleman. Thanks for everything Chief.

I would also like to thank Bob Breen. I travelled to Bobs Hoxton Academy during the 90’s and loved every minute. He is such an intelligent teacher constantly surprising and challenging people with his amazing stories and insights. Bob is such a warm person, so full of energy and enthusiasm. It’s an honour to call him my teacher and friend. Thank you Maestro.

I have to thank Erik Paulson. Erik has been my primary MMA coach for over 15 years. He is the funniest and most charming person I know. Just being around him brings me so much joy and he always teaches me lots of new tricks when I see him. His CSW grappling system is simple, powerful and fun to teach. All my success in the Ring and Cage is down to him. Thank you Erik.

I have to thank my best friend and training partner for the last 20 years James Evans-Nicolle. James is a not so gentle giant. We have worked together for over two decades and we always end up cracking up and having a laugh each time we train. James is a really good guy and a brilliant training buddy as he never cuts me any slack and is always looking to kick my arse. Cheers dude.

Finally, I’d like to thank my family for all their love and support in allowing me to do what I love every day.
## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Mitt Benefits</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Equipment</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technique Selection</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Padwork Round Structure</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Basics</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pad Positioning</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Footwork &amp; Padwork</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numbering System</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chaining</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Punch Combinations</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ups &amp; Double Ups</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Double Pads</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Striking Variations</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defences</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accuracy</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sectoring</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhythm Drill</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timing &amp; Focus Mitt Drills</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interception Drills</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Telegraphic Motion</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bruce Lee’s Five Ways Of Attack</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trapping &amp; Padwork</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faking</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six Types of Opponent’s &amp; Zoning</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longer Pad Combinations</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Round Kick Series</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Front Kick Series</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escaping the Corner</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fish Hooking</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superman Variations &amp; Counters</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Footsweeps</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinch Escape Drills</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Defence Drills</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MMA Pad Holding</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ground &amp; Pound</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long MMA Combo</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitt Master Conclusion</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

The book is structured to start with fundamental concepts progressing onto intermediate and then advanced drills. If you are a beginner and new to Martial Arts and combat sports it is best to follow the sequence I have laid out. It will allow a novice to learn the fundamental pad striking combinations, then develop footwork and head movement, eventually culminating in a highly complex mixture of offensive and defensive pad routines. Jumping into the advanced sections before mastering the basic numbers, combos and body mechanics will usually result in poor technique and increasing frustration as the drills will not feel good for either the pad holder or striker. It is worth spending several weeks if not months drilling the techniques in each chapter before moving on to the next. This will guarantee that the movements and skills start to become ingrained into the muscle memory. When a move can be executed automatically with excellent form then you’re ready to move on.

More experienced Martial Artists, who have solid fundamental skills in both striking and pad holding can obviously choose to mix and match techniques that they find useful. Each chapter has a brief introduction explaining the techniques and concepts it contains. It is quite acceptable to pick and choose areas that are of particular interest. But from personal experience I have often learnt as much, if not more, from the basic chapters of a book or DVD then I have from the advanced material. Skill in Martial Arts is a result of doing lots of basic things well. It is rarely a matter of learning one or two secret techniques that make a fighter great, rather it is all about mastering very simple techniques and making them part of the fighter’s personality through disciplined repetition.

Recent studies on “elite performance”, whether in chess, athletics or business seem to suggest that it takes around 10,000 hours of deliberate practice in order to achieve mastery. 10,000 hours practice is usually 10 to 15 years of daily training. It simply takes this long to get great. There are no shortcuts other than more deliberate practice. This is why top-level fighters tend to bloom in their late 20’s and early 30’s, as they have spent decades honing their craft, developing their unique skills and forging mental strength through overcoming adversity. The same rule applies to pad holding. It takes a long time to get good at holding pads. The ability to move the pads quickly and fluidly, whilst calling combinations and coaching is not easy. Lots of deliberate practice is needed to truly master the pads.

Each technique or drill in this book is followed by a short description on how to add it into padwork training and how to hold the pads correctly.
WHY A BOOK ABOUT FOCUS MITT DRILLS?

Because many students of Kickboxing and MMA clubs don’t really know how to use the focus mitts in order to maximise skill and improve fitness. Focus mitts allow you to train punches, kicks, knees, elbows, clinching, takedowns, trapping, ground and pound and more. However all the benefits of focus mitt training are dependant on the skills of the person holding the pads. Anyone who has trained in Martial Arts for a few months has experienced the terrible pad holder, a person who doesn’t really know how to hold the pads, who makes mistakes and who seems oblivious to how irritated their partner is getting. The end result is a poor workout and lots of frustration on both sides. The person hitting the pads doesn’t get a good workout and doesn’t improve their technique. The person holding the pads feels incompetent, clumsy and guilty for holding their partner back because of their inability to hold the pads correctly.

Good pad holding is one of the most important skills in combat sports. It can make the difference between a world champion and a nobody. This is very apparent in Boxing where expert pad holder’s like Rodger Mayweather or Freddie Roach are well respected and very well paid. In Kickboxing and MMA the padwork I have seen has nowhere near the sophistication that Boxing trainers have developed. Hopefully this book can help. The goal of this book is to improve, refine and develop pad holding skills with five aims in mind:

1. To protect the person holding the pads and the person hitting the pads

Poor pad holding can result in injuries to both parties. Hyper extended arms are common when hitting a pad that is not held firmly enough; and shoulder problems are rife in pad holder’s who don’t hold the pads in a position that aligns and protects their joints. If either the pad holder or striker gets injured when working the pads then the whole session is counter productive. As a trainer of many fighters I know how important it is to protect oneself from the continual impact a pad holder receives. This may not be so much of a problem in the first few years of holding pads but trust me after 20 years of holding for heavy hitting fighters it really damages the body if certain precautions are not taken. It is important to learn how to ride with the force of a strike, how to deflect the power of a strike and how to double up the pads if extra protection is needed.

2. To develop a system of pad holding that is easy to learn

Go onto YouTube and look at focus mitt drills and you will see lots of difficult and complex pad drills. The Mitt Master system is easy to learn and is designed to gradually improve your pad holding skills in a progressive and logical manner. There are no exotic or flashy techniques or drills randomly added. Everything is designed to slot together seamlessly so the end result should be smooth, fluid and most importantly effective padwork that challenges both the holder and striker. Too frequently padwork is just a random combination of drills picked up here and there by trainers with no common theme or systematic approach. The Mitt Master system is different in this respect, as it is logically structured to start with the most common strikes and defences; it then builds gradually, adding more challenging techniques and concepts as the pad holder’s skills improve. Because the system is based on common sense it is easy to pick up and integrate into any striking style. Which brings us to the next point.

3. To design a system of pad holding that is easy to add onto your existing style

The Mitt Master system should be easy to bolt into any combat sport, whether that be Boxing, Kickboxing, MMA or more traditional styles like Karate, Taekwondo or Wing Chun. Most Martial Art and combat sports use focus mitts so my goal was to design a system that could work for everyone regardless of style. While different styles have different techniques, how the human body moves always follows the same rules. Most of us have two arms, two legs and a head in the middle. This limits what we can physically do with
our bodies. All physical movements have to follow certain physical laws to do with position, leverage and rotation. We all have to adhere to the physical laws of the universe. The Mitt Master system is therefore designed to harmonise with these laws using them to maximise martial skill. It doesn’t matter which style a person practices, the drills included can be utilised by all people regardless of style, gender, age or physical strength.

4. To have fun whilst developing solid skills

Doing the same drills over and over, while good for ingraining muscle memory, can be boring. This is especially relevant for Martial Arts coaches that teach the public and specifically children (athletes and competitors tend to be more able to focus). Boredom is the enemy when teaching classes, as it destroys intensity. The secret when teaching recreational Martial Artists is to use disguised repetition, where moves are repeated frequently enough to develop skill but trained in different ways to avoid boredom. A simple move such as the jab can be taught or drilled in over 20 ways to challenge and inspire. For example a coach can work on making the jab more powerful, or faster, or how to set it up or how to use it in combination. Every technique can be taught and drilled in various ways to help the student stay interested. This makes training more fun for both the pad holder and striker and if something is fun people want to do more. Fun is important in Martial Arts. In all the top gyms I have trained at there was lots of laughter and fun. This is because at the elite level the training is so tough that without a bit of fun burnout is inevitable. During the most gruelling of sessions humour helps recharge and motivate and the pad drills in this book will help keep things fresh, interesting and fun whilst developing solid striking skills.

5. To make you a bad ass

Finally, focus mitt drilling should develop all the skills needed to be a great fighter. Once you mix good padwork with sparring and conditioning a coach has all they need to build a champion. These three elements - padwork, sparring and conditioning - form the cornerstones of an effective training programme. The skills developed in padwork should translate directly into sparring or else what is the point in smacking pads round after round. For fighters the whole goal of padwork is to improve skills and techniques used in sparring or competition. Every drill in this book is designed with this aim in mind. If a drill doesn’t directly improve sparring performance then it should be dropped. The drills taught in this book will help develop more skill and power in the ring.
My name is Matt Chapman and I am a lifelong Martial Artist. I started training when I was 10 years old and in 2012 celebrated my 25th year in Martial Arts. I started training in Ninjutsu, which was a really fun Martial Art to get started in. I learnt unarmed combat, how to use a samurai sword, silent movement and horse riding amongst many other crazy things. However, after watching Enter the Dragon starring the late great Bruce Lee, like a whole generation, I wanted to learn Jeet Kune Do (JKD). JKD is Bruce Lee’s own personal style, created before his untimely death. At that time there weren’t many JKD instructors in the UK so I started Kickboxing to develop my stand up striking skills. I did American Kickboxing for 2 years until I found out about Anton St James who was a Martial Arts Master who had studied Muay Thai with both Master Todd and Master Sken. Anton was also an Escrima instructor and a skilled Wing Chun practitioner. He was a brilliant instructor who opened my eyes to the cross training approach that is popular today. I started studying under Anton when I was 18 and have continued to this day. I am proud to call him my Master.

I then moved to London to further my academic studies. Whilst studying for a degree in sports science I trained at Bob Breen’s world famous Hoxton Academy. I spent 3 years training JKD and Kali with Bob and his team of instructors and refined and developed my stand up style under Bob’s expert eye. Bob’s Academy was an amazing place to train, there were so many top level Martial Artists there; Kickboxers, Muay Thai fighters, Wing Chun guys all mixing and sharing information. Bob also invited a number of elite Martial Artists to teach seminars at his Academy including Dan Inosanto, Rigan Machado, Lance Lewis and Erik Paulson. When I saw what Erik was doing I was blown away. Erik was teaching MMA before the first UFC, whilst also fighting in bare-knuckle MMA at the time. His style integrated everything I had learnt so I trained with him whenever he came over and eventually went to train with him in LA several times. Each time, I spent two weeks training intensely with Erik at the Inosanto Academy. We spent 4 hours a day training in his STX Kickboxing style plus the Shoot-Wrestling system he learnt in Japan. Erik’s knowledge is truly amazing, he has forgotten more than many people know.

After a few years I decided I wanted to test the skills I had developed so looked to do a few MMA fights. I fought in MMA between 2004-2006 and in my last fight won a British Welterweight Championship with one of the first UK MMA promotions CFC. I enjoyed testing my skills but didn’t enjoy fighting enough to go any further. It’s very important to be honest with yourself when fighting, as it is a dangerous pursuit. You should only fight at a professional level if you truly love fighting. I enjoyed the test and the training but found fighting strangely anti-climatic. For some reason I didn’t really enjoy bashing people. And when you get to a certain level you are only going to face people who love fighting. I was smart enough to realise that if I faced people in the cage who loved fighting, I was likely to get my arse kicked repeatedly. After much soul-searching I discovered my real passion was in teaching. I get more pleasure helping a person...
improve and reach their potential through Martial Arts, than I do fighting in a cage. Plus I get to share my passion for Martial Arts everyday for which I am truly grateful. I have always enjoyed working the pads with students and over the years I started to design my own drills that seemed to work well. At the same time I still wanted to keep growing as a Martial Artist so I went in search of further knowledge. I went on every Martial Arts seminar I could find and over the years learnt from such great fighters as Anderson Silva, Dan Henderson, Chuck Liddell, Marco Ruas, Wanderlai Silva, Master Sken, Randy Couture, Brad Pickett, Paul Daley, Nathan Leverton and Bill Wallace. I learnt so much from these seminars that I filled over 5 notebooks on techniques, drills and combos. The problem with seminars, however, is that just as you start to get going it ends. I felt I needed more intense training in order to improve.

I remember watching a DVD on Muay Thai training in Thailand and loved the simplicity and power of Thai Boxing. So after saving for a while I took several trips to Thailand to work on my Muay Thai at the famous Tiger Muay Thai in Phuket. My first trip was for a month and I trained 7 hours a day 5 days a week, which was fun if a little exhausting! The skill level in Thailand was amazing, I was training with coaches everyday who had over 200 fights. Sometimes I would turn up for morning training and there would be me, two other foreigners and six coaches. This meant I got lots of personal attention which was brilliant. The training in Thailand is relentless. Warm up was a 30 minute run or skip, then technical training with a partner followed by 4X5 minute rounds on the pads. Next was 4X5 minute rounds on the bags followed by 30 minutes clinch. To finish you do press ups, sit ups and neck exercises for 20 minutes, This is done in the morning at 6am and then again in the afternoon from 4pm in 30 degree heat and 80% humidity. It's killer, but you get very fit and skilled very quickly. You get a months worth of training at home within a week in Thailand.

I went back to Tiger three times over the next 3 years to improve my striking. Each time I went back I worked on different aspects of the stand-up game. For example, for one month I worked purely on my clinch and the following summer I went and worked on improving my kicking technique. Thailand is one of the best places in the world to get training as its cheap to live, cheap to eat and even training is cheap in comparison to training in the UK or the US. You can get a private lesson with a master instructor who has 15 years experience and over 200 fights for less than £10 an hour, which is insane. I would highly recommend training in Thailand for anyone who is serious about improving their striking skills, you cannot get better training cheaper. All this time I was making copious notes on new techniques and drills, and integrating all the knowledge I had acquired over the past decade. The Mitt Master system was starting to develop.
FOCUS MITT BENEFITS

So now you know who I am and what I have done let's talk about what good pad training will do for you.

**Fitness**

There are many definitions of fitness but most people agree that fitness comprises of various integrated physical elements including aerobic fitness, anaerobic fitness, strength, muscular endurance, range of motion (flexibility) and body composition (relative percentages of fat and muscle in the body). Pad holding can help develop many of these fitness attributes. Long steady rounds can develop aerobic endurance, short intense sessions will build anaerobic fitness. The repetitive nature of the drills develops specific muscular endurance and the movements of Martial Arts, such as high kicking will increase range of motion. Strength can be developed if padwork is combined with body weight or plyometric exercises. And of course intense padwork burns a lot of calories and therefore can help change body composition when combined with a healthy diet. All in all padwork develops fantastic fitness, anyone who disagrees is welcome to do five rounds on the pads with me!

**Specific skill development**

Padwork is flexible and can be designed to work on any specific skills you want to develop. Want to kick higher? Well add more high kicks into your routine. Need to punch harder? Then work on refining body mechanics and shifting body weight. Want to tighten up your defence? Get your partner to counter your strikes to improve your guard. Any Martial Arts skill can be learnt, improved and mastered on the focus mitts. The variations and combinations are literally limitless. Padwork is totally adaptable and can be used to improve any Martial Arts skill.

**Timing & distancing**

Punch bag or Heavy bag work is great for developing power but punch bags don’t move and they don’t hit back. Combat sports and Martial Arts are all about timing and distancing. There is always a best time and perfect distance to land a strike. The focus mitts really help develop an appreciation for correct distance and good timing. The pad holder can move anywhere he or she likes to force the striker to follow, cut off and corral. At the same time they can set the pads in different ways to help the fighter to develop good timing, all of which is covered in this book.

**Speed**

“Speed kills” is an expression that Boxers use to illustrate how important being fast is. You can have the hardest punch in the world but if it takes 3 seconds to land then it is very likely to miss as any idiot can step out of its way. In padwork speed is the third thing you develop after correct form and body mechanics and definitely before power. Power without speed leads to a slow, over-committed fighter whose only chance is to land that one big haymaker. Speed is something all fighters want. Speed is composed of several factors. There is recognition speed (where a stimulus such as an approaching punch is recognised), cognitive speed (where the correct response is calculated and selected) and movement speed (where the body moves to defend). Padwork will help develop all the elements of speed. By quickly flashing up a pad, its position must be recognised, the correct technique selected and the strike delivered all within a fraction of a second. Speed is a definite by-product of effective pad training.
Power

Power is cool. Everyone likes watching the heavyweights where one punch can end the fight. Traditionally Boxing gyms use the heavy bag to develop power but focus mitts can develop it too. It is really down to how skillful the pad holder is. Knockout power is a combination of technique, explosiveness, timing, distancing and body mechanics. Each of these elements can be worked on the pads individually or in unison. The only problem with developing power on the mitts is protecting the pad holder. Big heavy strong fighters hit really, really hard and they can damage an unskilled pad holder. Bicep tears, shoulder injuries and sore wrists are common in the inexperienced. I remember watching Ricky Hatton’s trainer, Billy Graham, injecting anaesthetic into his wrists to dull the pain before holding pads for Ricky. That’s what years of holding pads for heavy strikers will do to you unless you have excellent equipment and integrate techniques for absorbing and redirecting their power.

Defence

As mentioned, padwork is especially good for improving defensive skills. Boxing defensive skills include blocking, parrying, slipping and rolling. In Kickboxing you also need to add defences against kicks like checking, catching and scooping. And in MMA you will need all of the above plus takedown defence, clinching and ground & pound defence. That’s a whole lot of defence. In my opinion defensive skills are more important than offensive skills as anyone can hit hard if angry enough, but most people cannot defend in an effective and economical manner. Defensive skills can be difficult to learn as they tend to be counter intuitive. For example, when a person punches to your face the natural reaction is to flinch and extend the arms to fend off the punch. This flinch reaction is natural and instinctive but not very useful for combat sports, as it leaves big openings for follow up punches. For this reason it usually takes people longer to learn defence, as they are working against natural instincts. Interactive padwork (where the pad holder hits back) tightens up defence and over time it help reduce the flinch reaction. You only have to look at someone like Floyd Mayweather, the undefeated world champion, to understand how important good defence is. Floyd has excellent head movement and footwork that keeps him safe and allows him to counter at will when needed. He drills these skills daily on the pads with his uncle Rodger. Go to YouTube and check out Mayweather hitting the pads. Awesome! A good defence paves the way for a good offence.

Co-ordination

One definition of co-ordination is the organised working together of muscles and groups of muscles aimed at bringing about a purposeful movement. As there are many complex movements in combat sports, co-ordination is vital. Muscles have to fire in sequence and control movement in various directions simultaneously. If a fighter is not coordinated everything falls apart, distancing is wrong, timing is off and the body ceases to work as a unit. This is a disaster if it happens during competition as a fighter cannot perform well if he or she is uncoordinated. If you watch combat sports you will notice that the best fighters tend to have excellent co-ordination, that is their muscles work together to great effect. Good padwork should help develop this smooth, co-ordinated movement.

Heart

Not literally a heart (though it helps) but the ability to keep going when things aren’t going your way. Heart is essential if a fighter wants to be successful. You can have all the technique and skills in the world but if you lack heart to keep going when exhausted or hurt then you will never make it. I have lost count of the number of times I have watched or cornered fighters who are fantastic when they are winning but fall apart as soon as things don’t go their way. They lack heart. Some trainers say you are born with heart and others say that you can develop it. I think it’s a little of both. A fighter needs a certain amount of inborn resilience
and grit but hard training can definitely build upon that foundation. This is where intense pad drilling comes in, hard padwork develops the ability to keep going when tired. It taxes the heart and lungs, makes you gasp for air, burns the shoulders and deadens the legs. It really sucks but is important as it will test a fighter's heart before they get into the ring or cage where it really matters. If a fighter quits during padwork, there is a good chance they will quit in the fight when they get tired. Heart needs to be tested and trained.

**The Mitt Master System**

So in summary the Mitt Masters system aims to develop the following attributes:

- Fitness
- Technical skills
- Timing and distance
- Speed
- Power
- Co-ordination
- Defence
- Heart

In my experience there is a logical progression that works best when training these attributes. For example trying to develop power before technique will breed a slugger; a person with lots of power but poor technical skills. The best way I have found is to work on technical skills first, followed by timing & distance, co-ordination, speed, defence and finally power. Fitness tends to be developed as a result of the process. By following this sequential path, padwork will develop smoothly and skilfully. Just smashing the pads around with no regard for technique, timing or distance will produce a poorly skilled fighter. Nine times out of ten when a technical fighter meets a brawler the technician wins through superior technical ability.

Technique training should always come first, as combat sports are composed of many distinct techniques that when combined, define the sport. Boxing has its punches, Kickboxing its kicks, and MMA its takedowns and grappling. Without these technical skills a fighter has no tools to use and can only rely on instinct and athleticism. Boxing has many technical elements both offensive and defensive, Kickboxing has more and MMA has the most. This is because MMA has more dimensions than the other sports. In Boxing you can only punch and defend punches. In Kickboxing you can also kick but in MMA not only can you punch and kick but you also have to execute takedowns, grapple on the ground, strike on the ground and work submissions. This is why it takes longer to get good at MMA than other combat sports, there is just so much more to learn. However, as all MMA fights start standing, the first thing to learn in all three sports is stand up striking; and as most people naturally punch when angered, rather than kick, it generally makes sense to develop punching skills first.

For this reason the basic Mitt Master system starts with punching skills, followed by kicking and kneeing. After that we look at defence against punches, knees & kicks. If you are competing in Boxing or Kickboxing then that's the end of the technical skills you will need. In MMA a fighter will need to also train in takedown defence, takedowns off strikes and striking on the ground. Once these skill sets have been mastered then the training can focus on improving timing and distance and so on. We will discuss how long to spend on each section later.

But first things first.
Focus mitts or striking pads have come a long way in the last 10 years. Boxing gloves have been continuously improving but until recently focus mitts didn’t get the same attention from manufacturers. Luckily this has changed. There are now many styles and types of focus mitt suitable for novices right through to those for professional coaches. Choosing the right pair of focus mitts is the first step to becoming a good pad holder. Poor quality mitts can lead to injury and tend not to be durable, so there are several things to bear in mind when buying a pair of focus mitts.

**Are they thick enough to provide protection?**

Focus mitts vary widely in the amount of foam used to protect the holder’s hands. Cheap mitts tend to have a very thin layer of foam while pads specifically designed for use with heavy strikers have several thick layers. How much protection a pad holder needs depends on what the pads are to be used for. If the pads are to be used for heavy striking by big hitters, more foam protection is obviously better. If the pads are only to be used for light striking by smaller fighters then the pad holder can get away with less padding and a lighter mitt. A lighter mitt can be moved more quickly and is less tiring to hold, but offers less impact protection; while a heavy mitt can really tire the arms and shoulders, as the extra weight can be felt if the pads are held for long sessions. This leads us neatly onto question two.

**Are the pads light or heavy?**

Heavy pads tend to offer more protection but require greater shoulder and arm strength to hold for long periods. If the person holding the pads is required to hold them for multiple partner’s/fighters back to back they will really feel the burn of holding heavier pads. The heaviest type of mitt is the Thai Pad commonly used by Thai Boxing trainers. This long thick pad covers the hands and forearms down to the elbow. They are usually 3 to 5 inches thick and wrapped in tough leather. Thai pads offer the most protection of any mitt and, up until recently, were very heavy. Newer versions are made from high quality light foam and are much
easier to use. Thai pads either come straight or slightly curved. The curve is a recent development making the pads better at catching kicks as sweaty shins and knees sometimes slide off straight pads into the holder. Most gyms and Martial Arts clubs now use curved Thai pads.

Whilst Thai pads undoubtedly offer the most protection they can be difficult to move quickly into position for fast combinations and because the striking surface is so large they do not encourage the development of accuracy. This is because the fighter can hit anywhere on the target area. Focus mitts, because of their smaller target, tend to be more useful for developing accuracy.

I use both Thai pads and focus mitts. Thai pads for specific power development and focus mitts for training, speed and accuracy.

**Are the pads made from leather or a synthetic material?**

Traditionally leather pads were the only type of focus mitts available but now many companies are offering pads made from vinyl or other man-made materials. The main problem with leather is that when it gets wet (as it inevitably will if being used a lot), it can start to rot and smell. Man-made materials will not rot and can be easily cleaned with disinfectants. Leather, however, tends to feel better on the hands as it grips better. Vinyl and other shiny plastics can slip around a lot when they get wet. Unfortunately the only way to see which material you prefer is to buy pads and experiment with them. Waving them around in a shop really does not give a realistic impression of how they will feel being used day in and day out. Personal experience is the only way to truly establish which material feels best.

**What are the pads being used for?**

Are the pads being used for a gym class once a week or are they being held daily and struck by heavy strikers. Lightweight curved pads are quite appropriate for infrequent use. They are small, cheap, easy to hold and can fit into a regular gym bag without too much problem. They do not offer the most protection but if they are only going to be used once a week or less, then this may not be such an issue. If the pads are to be used several times a day these lighter smaller pads may not be up to the job. Heavier pads, with double or triple stitching, may be more appropriate as they will hold up to the abuse. Modern manufacturers of focus pads have done a good job at trying to provide different pads for different needs. Recreational practitioners can buy cheaper, smaller pads and professional coaches have access to serious heavy duty options.

Several companies are now developing really serious technological improvements in the quality of their pads. Rival, a Canadian sports manufacturing company have done considerable work on improving the impact protection of focus mitts. Their RPM10-d-30 focus mitt for example includes d3o, a British developed polymer with unique properties for impact protection. d3o is a lightweight material, very flexible and malleable until subjected to abrupt force, when it becomes stiff and impact resistant, making it perfect for Boxing equipment and protection. This means the pad is flexible when being used, but hardens immediately when impacted, offering protection to the holder.

The other way of lessening the impact of repeated hard strikes is for manufacturers to place an air cushion in the middle of the pad. This makes the pads thicker than usual but it also keeps the weight down. The air cushion acts to disperse the power of any strike offering extra protection. Fairtex make the best air cushion focus mitts in my experience.
How much do you want to spend?

The new technologically advanced focus mitts are up to five times more expensive than the cheaper models. Some pairs now cost over £100. These more expensive mitts are obviously targeted towards the full-time trainer who has to hold pads five or six days a week but if you have the spare cash you might as well invest a bit of money on protecting yourself. At the other end of the market are the cheap pads made of cheap leather or vinyl. They tend to be fairly basic and have a simple straight or curved design. These pads are frequently single or double stitched and sometimes can tear at the seams if used too frequently. Most beginners buy cheaper mitts as they are cost conscious and are not sure whether they will still be training in six months. If they stay with the program then they get a better pair once their cheap set has died. For most recreational Boxers and Kickboxers a pair of focus mitts that cost from £30-£50 will suit most needs.

How do they feel?

This is one of the most important questions. I have bought many pairs of focus mitts in the last 20 years and usually make a decision in the end not based on price but on how they feel while I’m wearing them. For this reason I do not buy focus mitts, that I have not worn previously, over the Internet. Pads may look great on screen but in the end it’s all about how they feel on your hands. All mitts should feel tight and snug when new and your hands should fit comfortably without you having to shoehorn them in. Many new style focus mitts include a wrist wedge designed to protect the wrists from errant strikes. This wedge shape block of foam can sometimes feel a bit uncomfortable so it is obviously worth trying them on before buying. Many pads are now curved as well, as this is a more natural shape for the hand to take when holding. Straight pads tend to lock the fingers out and can be quite uncomfortable if used for long periods.

In order to choose the right pair of pads it is best to go to a sport shop or Boxing shop and try on lots of different pairs of focus pads. This way you can get a feel for how different pads feel and compare and contrast based on price. Obviously listen to the advice of the shop owner but do not get pressured into buying a more expensive pair if they don’t feel right. Feel is the most important thing and I have taken pads back for exchange within one day of purchase as they just did not feel right. It is also worthwhile going online and reading reviews of pads by customers who bought them. This should hopefully get you some impartial information on how a pad feels and holds up to daily smashing.
Other things you might need

Whilst having a good set of focus mitts will allow for almost infinite drills there are several other pieces of equipment that can be used to improve a padwork session.

Thai pads

Thai pads are thick heavy duty striking pads commonly made of tough leather wrapped around thick padding. They are usually 10 to 12 inches in length and can be up to 6 inches thick. Thai pads are usually used for catching kicks and knees. Focus mitts are not generally designed for taking the impact of hard kicks. If a lot of hard kicking is required then Thai pads may be a safer option for both the striker and pad holder. The striker can kick with full power knowing in confidence that they will not hurt the pad holder and the holder is offered maximum protection from these powerful techniques.

Belly pad

The belly pad is a piece of kit originally from Thailand. It is a thick leather encased foam pad that is wrapped around the lower belly of the coach and held in place with Velcro or buckles. Thai fighters then execute knees and kicks to the belly pad freeing the coaches hands to hold the pads for upper body strikes. By having a belly pad to hit the fighter is encouraged to strike more freely and creatively by having targets both low and high. Push kicks and knees can be delivered to the belly pad at any time helping break the rhythm of the pad drills.

Body shield

The belly pad is very good at protecting the lower abdomen but if the whole body is a target then the body shield may be a good investment. This extra thick shield covers the entire upper body but still allows the pad holder a good range of motion and freedom of movement in the arms and legs. This shield is usually 4 to 6 inches thick and has reinforced strapping and stitching to hold it in place. This makes the entire body a target and allows the striker total freedom to strike anywhere high or low.

Thigh pads

Thigh pads are a relatively new invention, frequently used by Kickboxing and Thai Boxing coaches in the US. The thigh pads either wrap directly around the coaches upper leg or are attached to a belly pad. Thigh pads offer thick protection on the pad holder’s legs allowing for free and spontaneous low kicking by the fighter.

TOP TRAINING TIP

‘POST-TRAINING RECOVERY’

After training your body needs protein and carbohydrate within 90 minutes in order to refuel as efficiently as possible. Make sure you have a small nutritious snack or meal immediately after training.
TECHNIQUE SELECTION

Using all the experience I gained from my fantastic instructors, training seminars and competitive experience I started to develop the Mitt Master system to integrate the skills I learnt. The problem was that I had too much information to share, so I started filtering what I learnt by asking four questions of each technique or drill.

1. Can I use this technique in competition or on the street?

Everything that is included in the Mitt Master system needs to be effective in all combative situations. Some Martial Arts techniques work well in the ring and not on the street and vice versa. I have tried to choose techniques that work in both arenas. Techniques also need to work for all body types and genders. What works for a fifteen stone man may not work for a seven stone woman so I included only techniques that work for all body types and sizes. Overly complex techniques were removed, along with flashy or tricky moves, as they are too difficult to perform consistently. Flashy moves may be appealing on the movie screen but they have very little function in the cage or ring. This is because flashy moves require too many variables to align perfectly in order to be effective.

What defines a flashy technique, I hear you say? What may be a flashy technique in one Martial Art can be a basic technique in another. I define a flashy technique as a technique that requires high levels of skill, athleticism and attributes to make effective in sparring or competition. To me a kick such as a jump spin crescent kick is a flashy technique. This particular kick requires excellent timing, distancing, explosiveness and a high degree of flexibility in order to be performed correctly. This puts it out of the reach of the majority of Martial Artists and fighters and is therefore not a good choice for a functional padwork system such as the Mitt Master system. That is not to say that it has never been landed in a fight, but that in comparison to a round kick to the leg, a jump spin kick is far harder to execute successfully under the stress of competition.

2. Does this technique require strength or high co-ordination?

Techniques that required too much strength or power were also discarded as strength and power dissipate as soon as a person gets tired. Fatigue tends to negatively affect the performance of many techniques. The more a technique requires massive strength and power to work the more fatigue will reduce its quality. I was only interested in keeping techniques that worked whether a person was fresh or tired. Techniques that require high co-ordination also tend to fail under pressure as physical stress reduces fine motor skills and cognitive reasoning. That’s a fancy way of saying the more tired a person becomes the less skilled they become and the less able they are at making effective decisions. There have been studies performed that demonstrate once a person’s heart rate passes a certain point they are unable to perform fine motor skills. Basic big movements are about all we can manage when we are nearing exhaustion, and believe me fighting is exhausting. Once again it is important to learn techniques that work just as well when you are fresh and tired.

3. Is this easy to learn?

People only have a certain amount of time to train, so it’s a good idea to choose techniques that are effective, yet quick and easy to learn. Many recreational Martial Artists only train once or twice a week, so time is limited. Most techniques in this book can be learnt in under 30 minutes but will require regular
repetition to be ingrained into muscle memory. Martial Art students and fighters will need to train a movement until it is unconsciously competent, meaning that it happens automatically without any conscious thought. For some techniques this may take a few weeks or it may take a few months. Lots of technical repetition is the key to making a technique automatic. Practice makes perfect. Each repetition has to be executed with perfect technique, form and body mechanics in order to become part of the fighters nervous system. This requires great discipline as it is easy to perform a technique sloppily when tired or unmotivated and this affects the grooving of the technique. This is where a good pad holder or coach is vital as they monitor every technique and correct appropriately.

4. Is it a high percentage technique?

High percentage techniques are simple, direct techniques that work most of the time. A jab is a high percentage technique, it works most of the time and if it doesn’t work it doesn’t put you out of position and vulnerable to counter attack. A jump spin back kick is a low percentage technique for most people as it requires high athleticism, flexibility, perfect timing and distancing. Now, there are people who have made a jump spin back kick into a high percentage technique for them, but it would of taken hundreds of hours practice and drilling. Time and energy, that could perhaps be better spent on more functional techniques. People lead busy lives and only have so many hours to train per day so it’s a good idea to choose techniques that work in most situations even if you are tired, injured or off-balance. It is very tempting after a few years of training to start wanting to learn flashier tricks and techniques. But having watched elite level fighters you start to realise that the basics are more important. Top-level athletes are excellent at the basics because that is what they predominantly train. 75-90% of your training time should be spent on refining and mastering the basics.

By asking these questions, I discarded a lot of techniques and drills; and after a lot of culling and cutting, I was left with 100 drills that form the core of the Mitt Master system. As each drill includes several sections there are actually over 200 techniques in this book. All these drills can be mixed and matched. Techniques can be taken from the Boxing core and be applied in the MMA core and vice versa, everything is interchangeable. This makes the system flexible and allows for the individual development of style. Some schools I have trained at over the years have a very rigid style and method of teaching that does not encourage individual expression. Essentially the students are miniature copies of the master. This cannot be good as each person is different, has a different body type and a different temperament.

Every person is an individual and should be allowed to express that individuality. Padwork and training in general should reflect this. Training should be designed to develop the unique skills and attributes of the individual. In the West the days of the student following in the master’s footsteps are gone. Students want a personalised training experience that will develop their own skills and inborn talents.

Top Training Tip

‘INJURIES’

Bumps and bruises are an inevitable part of Martial Arts training. More serious injuries such as sprains and strains should be checked by a Physiotherapist. Seeing a Physio quickly will speed healing time by 30%.
**PADWORK ROUND STRUCTURE**

In the beginning of padwork training it is a good idea to only do as many rounds as possible until technique breaks down. Training after this point will only hinder the development of good technique. There is a point beyond which continuing to slug away on the pads with poor form and low-power will be detrimental. It is far better to rest and start again when fresh, than it is to continue with compromised technique. With this in mind, let’s discuss round length.

**Round length**

The length of a round is usually dependent on the particular sport being practiced. Boxing typically has 3 minute rounds with a 1 minute rest between each round. Thai Boxing also has 3 minute rounds but with a 2 minute rest between each round. MMA has 5 minute rounds with a minute rest between each round. Obviously if a person is training in a particular sport, the length of pad round should reflect the length of a competition round. The only exception to this would be if the padwork was being undertaken to develop speed or explosiveness. It is very difficult if not impossible to maintain full speed and explosiveness for more than a couple of minutes. The body and nervous system get tired and inevitably everything slows down. At this point if one is training speed it is a good idea to stop, fully rest and continue when maximum speed is possible again. So speed rounds tend to be shorter. Conversely aerobic fitness rounds will be performed at low intensity so can be longer as the aerobic energy system responds better to a more steady type of exercise. Aerobic rounds can be 10-20 minutes long.

For beginners 3x2 minute rounds with 1 minute rest between rounds is a good place to start. As fitness increases and skill improves more rounds can be added gradually building to 6x3 minute rounds for Kickboxers and 5x5 minute rounds for MMA fighters. A person who can perform this amount of training in a technical and disciplined fashion with high-intensity can consider themselves pretty damn fit.

**How to increase padwork intensity**

There are many ways to increase the intensity of padwork:

- The pad holder can add in striking blitzes such as frequent 10 punch sprints to up the effort.
- The pad holder can call for a certain number of bodyweight exercises such as press ups, tuck jumps or burpees at any time.
- The pad holder can incorporate a lot of footwork and changes of direction as this makes the striker move more and work harder.
- Longer, more complex striking combinations that require more effort can be used.
- Certain high-intensity sport specific moves can be added to make things harder. For example in MMA sprawling and tackling can make things really tough.
- The duration of a round can be lengthened or shortened to increase intensity. Sometimes longer rounds force a person to work harder and sometimes shorter rounds allow the person to expend more energy quickly.
• Mixing padwork with bag work can make training tougher as the bag allows for application of maximum power whilst the pads are used to improve speed and reaction time.

• The fighter can add extra resistance by using weighted vests or resistance tubing so that padwork is harder. There are many good products on the market now that are designed to help the athlete work harder.

• In the last few years UFC fighter Sean Sherk has developed a respiratory training device that limits the fighters intake of air making the lungs work harder. His training mask, which looks like a gas mask, is worn during padwork or conditioning and is claimed turbo charges fitness by forcing the body to extract more oxygen from the limited amount available through the holes in the mask. This unique bit of kit does take some getting used to and can feel quite claustrophobic, but many MMA fighters swear by its effectiveness. Looks a bit kinky to me.

**Styles of pad holding**

There is no one set way to hold the pads, some coaches prefer a more relaxed style, some encourage more aggressive striking and some work a more technical pad style. It all depends on the coaches personality and the goal of the training. Regardless of which style the pad holder prefers, it is worth working through the following eight variations to help produce a well rounded fighter:

1. **Attacking padwork.**
   Involves the coach calling high-intensity forward moving power combinations that develop aggression and an intense fighting style.

2. **Defensive padwork.**
   Defensive padwork focuses on tightening up the defensive movements of the fighter. So lots of quick strikes back from the pad holder are included to force blocking, evasion or parrying.

3. **Interception padwork.**
   Interception padwork is concerned with intercepting the attacking movement of the pad holder with a predetermined counter-attack (belly pads or coaching shields are good for this).

4. **Counter-attack padwork.**
   Counter-attack padwork works on evading a strike and immediately striking back with a pre-arranged combination.

5. **Footwork/ Head movement padwork.**
   This type of padwork is used to develop evasive footwork and head movement to keep the fighter out of harms way at all times whilst allowing for quick counter-attacks.

6. **Ring Craft or Cage Craft padwork.**
   Moving well in the Ring or Cage is a skill that needs to be developed as it does not come naturally. It takes lots of training to get comfortable moving in the confines of a Ring or Cage, so padwork needs to be performed to develop this under-appreciated skill. It is necessary to teach fighters how to move around, control the centre and escape the corners in a Boxing ring and how to use the fence to their advantage in a cage. Without this type of training fighters tend to find that the cage or ring can be used against them by a more experienced opponent. The ability to herd your opponent into a corner is essential in Boxing. Fighters who are able to do this dictate where the fight takes place and can control the position
and escape routes of their opponent. Considerable time needs to be devoted to learning good Ring or Cage Craft.

7. **Fight game plan padwork.**
If a competitor has a fight scheduled, padwork needs to reflect the game plan that has been designed to defeat the opponent. Certain combinations or tactics need to be repeated throughout fight camp till they are automatic and can be used on fight night. This type of padwork is different from general padwork as techniques and strategies are being practiced for a specific opponent. If one is fighting an opponent taller then padwork should reflect this and the pads held higher than usual. If the opponent is smaller the pads should be held lower than usual. Every other variable should be considered and should be incorporated into the game plan padwork.

8. **Isolation padwork.**
This type of padwork is all about improving weaknesses. If a particular technique needs improving isolation padwork is the answer. Let’s say a person needs to work on their kick defence, then the entire session can be focused on refining defences against kicks. Any technique or strategy can be isolated and worked until it is improved or mastered.

**Padwork Progression**

In order for padwork to develop as much skill as possible, it is necessary to progress from simple moves and combinations into more complex patterns and drills. Students who are new to pad holding need to get comfortable with the basic pad positions and simple combos first before attempting more elaborate technical combinations. If the pad holder tries to run with the pads before they can walk, bad habits can develop and this usually results in poor technique. Everything needs to be learnt in a step by step fashion that allows for a gradual increase in both intensity and technical skills. The Mitt Master system starts with basic single punch techniques, building to two and three punch combinations. Eventually, over a series of graduated steps, it leads to free-flowing striking combinations that involves both the attack and defence of punches and kicks, as well as takedowns and ground and pound in MMA.

The best progression for learning padwork is to:

- **Learn each techniques individually on the pads.**
- **Once the techniques have been mastered individually they can be combined in two or three part combinations.**
- **Next comes head movement and footwork before, during and after combination.**
- **Defensive moves such as blocking, parrying and evading then need to be integrated.**
- **Finally advanced concepts such as faking, feinting, non-telegraphic motion, sectoring and broken rhythm can be developed.**

Only once a person has mastered a step should they move further along the process. Trying to jump to the advanced levels in the beginning will lead to frustration and the development of technical faults. Slowly, slowly is the best course of action when learning how to hold the pads.

24 - - 100 Essential Pad Drills
So, using a jab for example, the Mitt Master system works like this:

- **Learn the jab.**
- **Use the jab in combination with other techniques.**
- **Add head movement before, during and after the jab.**
- **Use footwork with the jab.**
- **Fake and feint with the jab.**
There are 10 basic rules the person hitting the pads needs to follow when doing any type of padwork, shadow Boxing, or sparring. Following these basic rules allows the body to operate in the most effective and efficient manner, keeps the body balanced and allows for quick offence and defence. If these 10 rules are ignored then poor technique and defeat will be your constant companions.

1. Keep your hands up... but not too high!

Most of the time the fighter’s hands need to kept up protecting the face and brain. Knockouts happen when the hands drop away from the face exposing the jaw and temple. A strike to either of these points may result in a knockout, concussion or loss of balance. The hands need to be kept up close to the face and in line with the cheekbones. If the hands are lower than this they may not rise in time to protect the head and if they are higher then peripheral vision tends to be obscured. Peripheral vision is important in fighting as it is very sensitive to spotting quick movements and objects flying at the head. With limited peripheral vision a fighter is more likely to be caught by an unexpected punch or kick.

2. Keep your chin down

Tucking your chin into your collar bone helps protect you from getting clipped on the jaw and knocked out. Any time the chin is up a fighter is taking a massive risk, so keep the chin tucked down and slightly raise the lead shoulder to help hide it. Keeping the chin down also helps keep the nose down and protected and presents the forehead and skull to your opponent. If punches are going to land it is best to take them on the forehead or top of the head as these areas are protected by thick bone. While it still hurts to be punched on top of the head it is better than being punched on the nose or eye which can lead to problems with breathing or vision. It is always preferable to use evasive head movement to avoid taking any impact to the head if at all possible.

3. Keep your elbows down

Keeping the elbows down protects the ribs and internal organs from strikes and for MMA prevents the opponent getting under hooks and securing a takedown. It also aids in non-telegraphic motion (more on this later). The elbows are held in a relaxed fashion to the sides of the body. Try not to tighten the arms as this increases tension and reduces explosiveness.

4. Stay edge on

Staying edge on means angling the body 45° away from your opponent. This serves several functions. Firstly being edge on allows for good rotation of the upper body when striking. In order to generate power it is necessary to rotate the lower and upper body sequentially into strikes. Keeping the upper body slightly turned away facilitates this rotation.
This body position also only exposes half of the body to the opponent. Standing with the body square allows the opponent to strike both sides of the head and both sides of the body. This is obviously a disadvantage so it is better to stand in a manner that keeps half the body hidden. By doing this, you have then effectively made 50% of your body harder to hit.

5. **Either your head is moving or your feet are moving**

My Boxing coach always said “Either your head is moving or your feet are moving. If your head stops moving you move your feet. If your feet stop moving, you move your head”. I always remember this advice and tell my fighters the same. If you stop moving both your feet and your head, then you are a sitting target. Evasive movement is necessary before, during and after performing any technique. In a fight, every time the opponent misses they waste valuable energy and usually over-commit, so head movement keeps a fighter safe whilst creating opportunities to counter.

6. **Try to get an angle**

Getting an angle refers to the way the body is positioned in relation to the pad holder. There are good and bad places to stand when fighting. The worst place to be is standing directly in front of an opponent, as this allows them to strike with either hand or either leg at will. The best place to be is directly behind an opponent, as they cannot strike easily and cannot effectively defend as well. Most opponent’s, however, will not allow you to get behind them, so a compromise is needed. Against a right-handed opponent who is standing with their left leg in front, a good place to be is 45° to their left, outside their lead arm. This limits their striking potential as they will have to readjust to use their right cross and right kick. Being at this angled position is safer than being directly in front of an opponent as it increases your striking options and decreases your opponent’s striking options. Good footwork is necessary to get an angle.

7. **Keep the wrist straight and locked when punching**

There is a saying that there is no wrist in Boxing. The wrist needs to be kept straight and locked at all times to prevent injury to the small bones that form it. A bent wrist is vulnerable to being fractured or the ligaments torn when striking. This is why hand wraps protect not only the knuckles but also strengthen and support the wrist. Keep the wrist straight at all times.

8. **Try to strike with the two big knuckles when punching**

It is quite easy when hitting pads with Boxing gloves to swing away striking with whichever part of the fist happens to meet the pads first. The problem with this is that if one ever has to compete with smaller gloves (such as MMA gloves) or strike empty-handed (as in a self-defence scenario) the hands can be easily damaged by striking with the wrong surface area. All punches should be delivered with the two large knuckles of the fist. This serves a number of functions. These knuckles are the biggest and strongest so they are less prone to injury. They also align with the forearm when the wrist is straight, increasing power delivery. Never strike with the second knuckles or the thumb as both of these areas are easy to break. This is why it is
sometimes good to occasionally strike the pads bare knuckle as you will get immediate feedback through the hands as to which areas are contacting the pads. This sensitivity can be easily lost when wearing thick Boxing gloves. Once a month do a pad session with bare knuckles and really focus on keeping the wrist straight and striking with the two large knuckles. You may be surprised at how difficult this is and how much it hurts to punch hard without wraps or gloves. Many Martial Artists such as Karateka spent considerable time toughening their hands and knuckles by striking bags, pads and specially constructed “makiwara” or toughening posts. Over months and years, the Karate student can eventually harden their hands to the point where they can punch through wood and concrete. The obvious problem with this type of intense conditioning is that over the years, while the hands become tougher, they also become prone to arthritis, so for the majority of Martial Artists hand conditioning is not feasible nor necessary.

9. Try to use the heel or shin when kicking

There are many small bones in the foot and ankle - Kickboxers frequently break these fragile bones when kicking with the instep of the foot. It is, therefore, safer to take the approach that Thai Boxers use, which is to kick with the shin bone rather than the foot. The shin is a long thick bone and is more resistant to trauma than the smaller bones of the foot. Over the years of kicking pads, bags and sparring, the shin bone actually thickens and hardens making it stronger. So when delivering round kicks that travel in an arc, the shin is the weapon of choice. For front kicks and side kicks the best impact point is either the heel or the ball of the foot. Sometimes it is harder to hit the target with the ball of the foot as it is smaller, so many fighters prefer striking with the heel. Using the heel is often better as the heel is very hard and can take a lot of impact without getting damaged. Plus when striking with the heel the toes are drawn back keeping them out of danger.

10. Keep one hand up when kicking

One of the easiest times to get knocked out is during a kick as the mechanics and momentum of the kick swing the arms away from the head creating an opening for an opponent to land a punch. Whenever a kick is executed at least one hand should be kept up guarding the chin to protect against a counter punch. This needs to be a disciplined part of padwork so that every time a fighter kicks, the opposite hand is held up defensively at all times (see pic below).
GOOD & BAD PAD POSITIONING

Good pad holding promotes correct technique. If the pads are held at the wrong angle or in an unrealistic manner it can breed many bad habits and actually harm the development of technique. Let’s look at bad pad positioning first, as it is more common.

Holding the pads at the wrong height

Pads need to be held at the right height for the person striking. For example, head strikes need to held at the same level as the striker’s head. The same applies to body shots, they need to be appropriate for the person striking. The person hitting the pads does not want to be punching up or punching down in order to strike. Holding the pads higher stresses the muscles of the shoulders. Holding the pads lower encourages your partner to drop their hands in order to reach the pads, which is a dangerous habit.

Unrealistic positioning

Holding the pads too far apart is another common problem. Pads should never be held more than shoulder width apart. Too far apart and the striker has to start reaching to contact each pad, which will lead to over rotation and slow the next technique. The pad should also be held as close to the body as possible to replicate the actual position of targets on the body. It is very common to see beginners holding the jab-cross combination with the pads maybe 2 or 3 feet apart. This is very unrealistic unless you’re fighting two people. The pads need to be in a realistic position at all times so your partner can develop correct positioning, angling and body mechanics.

Banging the pads onto the punch

Many pad holder’s bang the pads towards oncoming punches. This creates a false distance and unnecessary impact on the joints. If the pad holder is constantly banging the pads onto the oncoming punch this naturally shortens the punching style of the person hitting the pads as they don’t have to fully extend to reach the target. Encourage your partner to fully extend their punches so that they generate maximum leverage and distance. Just hold the pad in the correct position and allow the person to strike when ready.

Floppy arms

Some people keep their arms too relaxed when holding pads and the person hitting gets no feedback or impact from the pads.
This can also result in injury if the person punching hyper extends their arms in an attempt to hit hard when the pad isn’t firmly braced for impact. It is important to keep your arms strong yet flexible. There should be a certain amount of tension in the pad holder’s arms so that both partner’s can feel the impact comfortably.

**Not moving**

Only punch bags stay still when they get hit, people move when they get hit. As soon as a combination is completed the pad holder needs to move in any direction they want and make the striker adjust. This makes padwork more realistic and challenging. In sparring or competition both parties are constantly moving in order to establish a dominant position or angle to attack. Pad holding should reflect this reality and incorporate footwork at all times. It is very easy to get stuck in a particular pattern of footwork, so a good coach is always watching his fighters to make sure they move in all the directions available. The pad holder should also check that they are not constantly moving in the same direction when holding the pads as this is unrealistic. At a minimum make sure you move forward, backward, left, right, and circle when holding the pads.

**Not coaching your partner**

Standing there thinking about what is on television later does not make a good pad holder. You have a responsibility to your partner when holding the pads to ensure they get a good workout and improve their technique. It is important to coach your partner so that you both improve every session. If they are dropping their guard every time tell them or hit them, either way, help them. Good partner’s also try to motivate each other when they get tired. A good pad holder keeps you going when you are in pain and want to quit. Sometimes people forget the important job a pad holder does. They are there to train, motivate, coach, and improve their partner’s technique and fitness so they need to be fully present and focused when holding pads. Not thinking about or paying attention to your partner is disrespectful and can actually hinder their development. If you are not going to be a good pad holder it is probably best to let your partner go on the bag instead so you don’t mess them up.

**Good pad holding**

Holding the pads in the correct position serves a number of important functions.

- It establishes the correct distance for each technique.
- It encourages the striker to maximise body mechanics.
- It helps create good technical form.
- It enables smooth transitions between each technique.
- It protects the pad holder from injury.
Holding the pads at the right height within the confines of the body and in the correct position will develop good holding technique. This requires diligent practice. It continually amazes me how much effort people put into hitting the pads and how little effort they put into holding them. Don’t be that guy or girl. Take the time and effort to learn how to hold the pads well. Besides holding at the correct height and close to the body, certain techniques will need different positions or angles. In all cases the pad surface should be clearly presented and the other pad held to the chest, out of the way. In the beginning, holding only one pad out at a time helps reduce confusion and gives the striker a very clear target.

After a few months training pads can be held up simultaneously to allow for faster combinations.
Footwork is one of the most important skills in combat sports. Footwork dictates whether you are able to get close enough to strike, positions you for follow-ups and gets you out of danger when needed. I cannot over emphasise how important footwork is. As footwork is so critical, it should be included in every session. It is vital that a fighter develops the ability to move in any direction, smoothly and on balance.

A fighter’s feet and legs are his powerhouse, responsible for initiating all movements and generating power. If the fighter has poor footwork they cannot control range, cover distance in order to strike or evade attacks.

There are several key elements required for good footwork:

1. Keep your knees bent as this allows for quick changes of direction and explosive movement. If your legs are straight you will need to bend your knees before you can move, so keep your legs slightly bent at all times.

2. Try to move on the balls of your feet. If you keep your feet flat, your weight tends to settle on the ground and you will start dragging your feet, which creates friction and slows your movement. You want to be up on the balls of your feet so that your heels are just off the ground. It should be possible to slide a piece of paper under your heels at all times. By keeping your feet in this position you create explosive potential in the leg muscles, meaning you can move faster and adjust quickly to changes of direction.

3. Avoid letting your feet drift too far apart as this slows movement and, in Kickboxing and MMA, it will leave you vulnerable to leg kicks or takedowns. In order to block a leg kick it is necessary to have a balanced stance where either leg can lift to shin block quickly. A stance that is too wide makes quick shin blocking impossible.

4. A fighter’s feet should also never come too close together. A narrow stance reduces the body’s ability to generate power and makes the fighter vulnerable to being swept or losing balance. The feet should be kept at a comfortable distance apart at all times. As all people are individual there is no exact universal distance between the feet that is appropriate for everyone. Some people prefer a wider lower stance and some prefer a shorter narrow stance. You can experiment with different stances and over time you will find a balanced stance that allows for free movement, coupled with the ability to generate power.

5. When moving a fighter should glide along the floor rather than take big steps. Every time the foot is off the floor there is a loss of power and an inability to quickly change direction. Most of the time the feet want to stay in contact with the floor. Small gliding steps will help you maintain your stance and keep your base under your body for effective attack and defence.

6. Try to avoid moving in one direction repeatedly, as a good opponent will notice this preference and set a trap. Footwork needs to be smooth and unpredictable. It is important to have the ability to move in every direction possible in a balanced and unpredictable manner.

7. Never cross your feet when moving, as this creates an unstable base and limits the potential number of techniques you can use from a crossed foot stance.

8. Lead with the foot that is closest to the direction you want to move in. So in an orthodox stance (left foot in front) a fighter that wishes to step forward should lead the movement with their front foot. In the same stance a fighter that wishes to move backwards should lead the movement with their rear foot.
they wish to move left they should lead with the left foot and if they wish to move right they should step with their right foot. These instructions are reversed for a southpaw fighter (right foot in front). This keeps the stance balanced at all times.

9. One of the best bits of advice I have been given about footwork is to imagine there is a chain around your ankles stopping your feet from moving too far apart and a stick between your knees stopping your feet moving to close together. If you visualise this when training it will help you maintain a good base and control your footwork.

When training the basic numbers, Boxing combos and drills, practice each technique with footwork, so that you can move comfortably in any direction whilst striking or defending. Most fighters feel comfortable moving forward but have a harder time retreating or angling to the left or right, so it is wise to spend a bit more time moving in these directions. In an ideal world you would charge through your opponent and win the fight without breaking a sweat. Unfortunately this rarely happens (to me anyway) so developing good defensive footwork is necessary.

Three types of padwork

There are three types of padwork: passive, active and interactive. Passive padwork is when the person holding the pads dictates exactly what happens. They call the combinations and correct any problems or technical errors. This is usually considered basic padwork and is good for beginners, as they need clear and simple instructions that should be focused on improving their technique.

Active padwork is appropriate for more experienced Martial Artists/fighters as it requires the person striking the pads to take a more active role in the process. The striker can throw fakes, strike with a broken rhythm and call combos that they want to practice. In passive padwork the pad holder is in control and in active padwork the striker is in control. Interactive padwork involves both pad holder and striker working together. The holder can call combinations and strike back to force defensive movements and the pad striker can strike, use fakes and feints and break the rhythm of the padwork. Interactive padwork is probably the closest thing to live sparring. Real sparring or fighting is unpredictable and has elements of attack and defence happening at all times. For padwork to have real value it should reflect this reality and replicate the chaos and randomness of sparring. Only intermediate and advanced students should be exposed to this more chaotic style of padwork as they have solid defence and fundamentals. Beginners tend to get overwhelmed by this intense style of training and need to spend more time mastering the basics. Interactive padwork can also involve tactics for facing the six types of opponent’s, as discussed on Page 110.

TOP TRAINING TIP

‘STRETCHING’

Stretching is very important and should be performed after each session. Most people need to work on their leg flexibility in order to improve their kicks and minimise the chances of injury.
Like most Boxing clubs we use a basic numbering system to describe each technique. This has several advantages. It speeds up combinations, as it is easier to call a series of numbers “1,2,7,3,2” that it is to say “jab, cross, knee, hook, cross”, so padwork is faster and more fluid using numbers. Plus, during fights it easier for a coach to shout out a number or combination of numbers that a fighter can hear over the roar of the crowd. Also, if a coach shouts out “uppercut” the opponent and his corner can also hear you so it takes the element of surprise out of the equation. It is better for the coach to shout out “5” and the fighter throw the uppercut, hopefully surprising his or her opponent, with some knuckles to the chin. Numbers make life easy, quick and as soon as you learn the sequence: simple.

**Drill 1.** Our Boxing number system is as follows:
In the beginning everyone starts at 1- Jab and works through the numbers depending on which style they are training: Boxing, Kickboxing or MMA.
All the numbers and drills in this book are trained through the following levels.

**FIRST: Technical skill**
The correct technical execution of the move.

**SECOND: Body mechanics**
Good weight shift, rotation & drive from floor.

**THIRD: Stationary then moving**
Basic footwork patterns, step forward, step back, step left, step right, step & slide, slide & step, pivot.

**FORTH: Head movement**
Side to side, duck, bob & weave, snap back.

**FIFTH: Adding speed and power**
Once each technique can be performed correctly with good body mechanics, footwork & head movements you can start adding speed followed by power.

---

**TOP TRAINING TIP ‘STRETCHING #2’**
Do a stretch for the hamstrings and adductors after every class (the hamstrings are the muscles on the back of the leg and the adductors are the inner thigh area). Hold each stretch for at least 3 minutes.
**CHAINING**

Chaining means linking one technique to another. Start with 2 link chains and move on from there. When chaining it is not realistic to do chains that are too long without adding head movement or footwork.

Most chains should be from 2-5 moves long. Certain chains are common to most gyms and clubs. That’s because certain combinations have been proven over time in combat to be most effective.

**Drill 2.** Common chains (combinations) in Boxing are:

1-1

**Double Jab**

Jab, Cross

Double Jab, Cross
Jab, Cross, Hook

1-2-3

Cross, Hook, Cross

2-3-2

Hook, Cross, Hook

3-2-3
Jab, Overhand, Hook
1-4-3

Hook, Uppercut, Hook
3-6-3

Uppercut, Hook, Cross
6-3-2
Drill 3. Common Kickboxing combinations using hands and feet are:

- Jab, Cross, Uppercut, Cross
- Jab, Round Kick
- Jab, Cross, Round Kick
Jab, Cross, Hook, Round Kick

Front Kick, Cross, Hook

Round Kick, Hook, Cross
Drill 4. Common MMA combos are as follows:

- **Front Kick, Round Kick**
  - 8-9

- **Jab, Jab, Sprawl**
  - 1-1-10

- **Jab, Cross, Sprawl**
  - 1-2-10
Jab, Cross, Hook, Shoot

1-2-3-11

Jab, Overhand, Shoot

1-4-11

Jab, Cross, Shoot

1-2-11
Try all of these combinations on the pads. Start slowly as it will take a while to understand how these techniques work together - don’t expect to excel at them immediately. Developing skill in any sport takes time and disciplined effort, so be patient. Once these combinations have been mastered with good technique and body mechanics, follow the same process incorporating footwork and head movement. It is important to master these combinations early in the development of a Martial Artist/fighters, as they form the basis of good offence and defence.
3 PUNCH COMBINATIONS

You can create your own combos now. You will find certain combos more effective than others and that is fine. Everyone is different and everyone likes different combinations.

Drill 5. There are eight three punch combinations we use:

- **Combo 1**: 1-1-2

- **Combo 2**: 1-2-3

- **Combo 3**: 2-3-2
Combo 4
3-2-3

Combo 5
4-5-4

Combo 6
3-3-3
These combinations can also be chained together, so you could do Combo 1, followed by Combo 2 or mix them however you like. If you want to mix the basic numbers with the combos then that's easily done, just give the number.

“1”

Followed by the combo,

“1 & Combo 3”

So you get a jab followed by a cross, hook, cross.

**TOP TRAINING TIP**

*NUTRITION*

Healthy eating is all about balance. Too much of any one food group will cause problems. Try to eat complex carbs, colourful vegetables and lean protein with every meal.
UPS & DOUBLE UPS

The uppercut is one of the most underutilised strikes in combat sports. This is because it requires getting close to an opponent to be effective and can be countered easily.

In order to practice the uppercut frequently we use the terms “up” and “double up” as this is quicker to say than “uppercut” and “double uppercut”.

**Drill 6.** First of all we add a single uppercut after each number with the opposite hand.

1 + Up = Jab & Uppercut

2 + Up = Cross & Uppercut

3 + Up = Hook & Uppercut
Once the basic numbers have been practiced with a single uppercut, then the double uppercut can be developed.
Drill 7.

1 + Double Up = Jab & Rear Uppercut, Lead Uppercut

2 + Double Up = Cross & Lead Uppercut, Rear Uppercut

3 + Double Up = Hook & Rear Uppercut, Lead Uppercut
The same process can then be applied using the Boxing combos 1-8. The Boxing combos can be followed by a single “Up” or a double “Up”.

Using the uppercut frequently will help the fighter improve the techniques and body mechanics, and help them understand the range where the uppercut is most effective.
**DOUBLE PADS**

A single pad usually indicates to the fighter to use a single technique. Doubling the pads up is used as a way to tell the fighter to throw two of the same techniques in succession.

Doubling can be done for most techniques including:

- Jab
- Cross
- Hook
- Left body hook - Right body hook
- Liver punch - Hook
- Uppercut

**Drill 8. Double jab**

To signal a double jab both the pads are held to the left-hand side of the coach’s head and the right pad is placed on top of the left pad. This is easily achieved by elevating the right elbow. As soon as the striker hits the right pad it is moved down and away, allowing them to strike the left pad immediately after. This helps them realistically apply a double jab in sparring, as the head is likely to move back a few inches when hit with the first jab.

**Drill 9. Double cross**

To signal the double cross the pads are held to the right-hand side of the coach’s head and the left pad is placed on top of the right pad. A similar pattern is followed with the left pad being removed after the first cross makes contact.

**Drill 10. Left hook to body – left hook to head**

If the pads are held on the right side of the pad holder’s body with one low and one high, is a signal for a left hook to the body followed by a left hook to the head. As soon as the hook lands on the lower pad it is bounced up quickly to the top pad.
Drill 11. Left hook to body - right hook to the body

Holding the pads with the arms crossed and the back of the hands touching allows the striker to practice alternating hooks with the left and right hand.

This crossed arm position can be held low for body hooks or high for head hooks.

Drill 12. Liver shovel hook - left hook to head

Double pads held to the right-hand side of the body, over the pad holder's liver, indicates a shovel hook to the liver swiftly followed by a left hook to the head.

Drill 13. Double uppercut

Both pads are held in the uppercut position. This allows the fighter to land the first uppercut, and as the bottom pad is moved away, follow with another uppercut.
**STRIKING VARIATIONS**

Using the same techniques in the same way repetitively breeds a predictable fighter. Once the basic techniques are mastered it is possible to start adding technical variations. Training the basic techniques in different ways gives the fighter extra tools to use. As there are only 10 to 20 basic techniques in Kickboxing or Thai Boxing, it is worth developing variations in order to present an opponent with some different problems to solve. Working on variations also helps to alleviate some of the boredom of training repetitively day in and day out. In order to be successful in Martial Arts and fighting, it is necessary to train basic techniques repeatedly over weeks, months and years. This can be rather monotonous and unless the athlete is highly disciplined can result in a loss of motivation.

By adding these variations the fighter still trains the basic techniques but gets to work out in a slightly different way and learn something new. All the following variations are simple adaptations of the basic techniques. They can be added to pad training at any time. It is a simple matter of ‘calling the technique’ or placing the pad at the appropriate range and letting the fighter choose which variation to apply.

After each technique, or variation of techniques, there will be a short section on “HOW TO ADD THIS”. This will explain how to add a particular technique or drill into padwork.

**Drill 14. Different types of jab**

There are many different ways to jab. The jab can be used as an offensive attack, a defensive tool or a setup for another technique. Throwing a jab in a different manner or from a different angle makes a fighter unpredictable and helps disrupt the opponent’s timing and strategy. There are five basic types of jab.

**Speed Jab**

This is a quick explosive jab designed to overwhelm and surprise. As this is a quick punch, some power is lost. It is not designed to knock an opponent out but is usually a setup for a more powerful technique following behind. In order for the jab to be as fast as possible the arm needs to be relaxed and the hand kept open inside the glove until the point of impact. Any tension in the arm or hand will slow the punch down and turn it into a push jab. Relaxed muscles are capable of explosive movement so try to limit any excess tension. To make the jab as fast as possible and to work on a non-telegraphic initiation, the pad holder can move the pad out of the way of the punch if he or she sees it coming. This forces the striker to stay relaxed, control distance and work on explosive speed. Just be careful of the elbow hyper-extending in an attempt to reach a pad that is moving away.
Power jab

The Power jab is different from the speed jab in that its primary purpose is to cause damage and back the opponent up. More power is added to the jab by driving the bodyweight forward off the rear leg, rotating the shoulders and stiffening the arm at the moment of impact. This turns the arm into a rigid pole, through which bodyweight can travel. The impact of this punch can be increased by timing it so that the opponent steps forward onto the power jab. This doubles or triples the power, as it results in a collision between the jab and the oncoming pad. The simplest way to train this jab is to have the pad holder hold up the pad and step forward into the oncoming punch. This will help the striker work out the right timing to land the technique at the precise moment their bodyweight is shifting forward, but before it is grounded through the front foot. The pad holder provides essential feedback regarding the fluctuations in power, as the striker practices the technique.

Thumb up jab

The thumb up jab is thrown with the vertical fist, i.e. the thumb is facing upwards as the jab is delivered. The reason for this positioning is that it allows the jab to sneak between the gloves of a guarded opponent. Turning the thumb downwards as you would with a traditional jab makes a gloved fist wider, and, sometimes it cannot fit between the opponent’s hands when they assume a tight guard. The vertical fist, because of its narrower profile, sneaks between the gloves and lands squarely on the nose. Ouch!

Thumb down jab

This jab has a corkscrewing motion that helps create cuts by tearing the skin on contact. The rotation of the hand at the end of the punch also has the advantage of raising the lead shoulder, thus protecting the chin from a counter. The twist is performed right at the last moment and it is worth experimenting with the amount of twist needed to perform this technique. Some people twist their thumb all
the way, so that it is pointing to the floor; others twist it much less. It is all a matter of personal preference. Spend some time practising this jab on the pads and bags until a comfortable compromise is achieved.

**Cuban jab**

This jab is variously known as a Cuban, or sometimes Mexican jab, as it is popular with fighters from these countries. The Cuban jab starts with a low half guard and is flicked up from below, under the opponent’s vision, to the face. An explosive lunge forward at the same time makes this punch very deceptive and hard to counter.

When delivering this punch from a half guard, it is necessary to be turned side on with the jabbing hand across the body, hidden from the opponent’s view. It then uncoils like a snake in an explosive lunge from low to high. If the pad holder can see the hand before the jab is thrown then it is less effective. Deception is the key with the Cuban jab.

**“HOW TO ADD THIS”**

The different types of jabs can be trained on the pads by both the pad holder and the striker.

The striker can throw any of these jabs when the pad holder calls for a jab, or the pad holder can call for each individual type as and when it is needed.

Just call “Speed jab”, “Power jab”, “Up jab”, “Down jab” or “Cuban jab”, and the striker will perform the required jab.

**Drill 15. Different types of hook**

Just as with the jab, there are also different types of hook. Changes to distance, angle and position mean that one standard hook will not solve all problems. Starting from the closest range, we will investigate the different types of hook.

**Close range hook**

This hook is for infighting and close range Boxing. Commonly used when the opponent is head-to-head with the fighter, it is a quick short hook thrown in close and tight. The elbow pops
up as the shoulder turns and the hook is delivered directly in front of the head. To train this type of hook, the pad holder can place the focus mitt directly on the striker’s forehead and the striker has to rock back a little to create some space and throw the hook in close.

**Mid range hook**

This hook is used in the mid range, usually at about half the extended arms length. A quick twist of the lead foot creates a chain of movement that should continue to the hip and shoulder, whipping the hand around into the target. The thumb can be held vertically or rotated to a horizontal position as the hook lands. The arm should be at a right angle, parallel to the floor, as the hook hits; the rear hand should be up and protecting the jaw. Try not to over-throw this hook as it can lead to a loss of balance and give the opponent an opportunity to counter over the top with a cross. The hook should be delivered to the target and then quickly returned to stance. A person who repeatedly over-commits on the hook can be corrected on the mitts by occasionally moving the pad out of the way of the oncoming hook, to see if the fighter can control the rotation and effectively recover to stance without losing balance.

**Long-range hook**

The long-range hook is performed at almost full extension of the straightened arm. At this range it is necessary for the thumb to be rotated down and contact to be made with the top of the knuckles. The end position is similar to the thumb down jab, with the arm straight and the thumb pointing towards the floor, but the striking surface is the back of the hand and knuckles. The body mechanics take a bit of getting used to, but the long-range hook is an effective tool to have. This technique is very common in Savate, the French Kickboxing style where it is called the swing punch.

**Leaping hook**

At even further out, it is necessary to jump into the lead hook. A twist of the body down towards the left whilst keeping both eyes on the target helps create torque and coils the body ready to strike. The hook is then thrown with an explosive leap towards the pad holder. The jump is more of a horizontal slide than a vertical leap. The feet should barely leave the ground as the body travels
through the air. It is easy to over-commit on this particular hook, so a special effort needs to be made to control the momentum, especially if the hook misses its intended target. Try not to fall flat on your face if it misses, you will look stupid and people will laugh.

**“HOW TO ADD THIS”**

*Once again the pad holder can call any of these hooks at any time or can place the hook at the appropriate distance and allow the striker to chase with the appropriate technique.*

---

**Drill 16. Different types of uppercut**

The uppercut is traditionally a close range technique used to lift the head onto following strikes. Driving through the hips and legs, the uppercut is classically thrown close to the body and into the target. As with all the other punches, there are various ways to perform this technique is well.

**Close range uppercut**

This uppercut is used in close range. A coordinated shrug is used to generate power for this technique, starting from the legs and into the body. Holding the pad to the striker’s forehead, with the pad facing the floor, will help the fighter learn the correct distance and body mechanics to use this technique. Drive through the legs, turn the hips and shrug the shoulders at the top of the punch.

**Mid range uppercut**

This is the more traditional uppercut thrown at mid range. The arm does not extend that much further, but you should use bigger body mechanics and more rotation. The chin needs to stay tucked into the collarbone and the opposite hand is held high as the mid range uppercut is thrown.
Long-range uppercut

The long range uppercut is a risky move, because uppercutting the arm at this range can leave one vulnerable. This needs to be executed with excellent timing, or when the opponent is already dazed from previous strikes. Junior Dos Santos, the UFC Heavyweight Champion, has knocked out many opponent’s with this long-range uppercut. This technique may be more useful in MMA as it can catch opponents who are attempting a takedown on the way in, doubling its impact.

“HOW TO ADD THIS”

Distance will dictate which uppercut will be used. If the pad is placed on the forehead, then a close range uppercut is the obvious choice. The further the pad is held away from the striker will determine which uppercut is required.

Drill 17. Different types of front kick

The front kick is a powerful kick designed to injure or push an opponent back. It can be delivered to the leg, body or head and has a number of interesting variations that make it a dangerous kick.

Snap front kick

The Snap front kick is common in Karate and uses a quick snap from the knee to develop power. It can be targeted to the body or to the chin. The whip is generated by raising the knee, and pulling the heel back to the buttocks before snapping the kick forward. This retraction creates a stretch reflex on the quadriceps muscle, adding more power and velocity to strike. The striking target is usually the ball of the foot. Check out Anderson Silva’s knockout of Vitor Belfort in UFC 126 to see how effective this kick can be.
The push front kick

The push front kick is used to push the opponent away in order to maintain a safe distance. The knee is lifted and the whole sole of the foot is used to violently push the opponent away. It is easy to visualise the mechanics of this kick if one imagines kicking in a door. The knee is drawn up and the foot explosively pushed out in order to generate impact. The striking surface is the entire sole of the foot.

The swing front kick

This is a technique taken from Thai Boxing and commonly performed with the rear leg. The rear leg is straightened and thrown towards the target and the hips pushed into the strike at the moment of impact. This is a surprisingly powerful front kick that uses the leg as a ramrod in order to halt the opponent’s advance instantly. Keep the leg locked straight and push with the hips to generate power.

The switch front kick (not shown)

The switch front kick is a lead leg kick that is switched in order to fake or to generate more power. From the regular stance the lead leg is quickly switched back, and, as soon as the ball of the foot touches behind, the front kick is thrown forward. The switch movement has momentarily changed the lead which increases the kicks power.

The jump front kick

The jumping front kick was a kick made popular by the original Karate Kid movie. It still sees use today in competition and it was a kick used by Lyoto Machida to knock out and retire Randy Couture in UFC 129. The rear knee is drawn up as a fake and with a quick explosive push, the
kick is delivered with the support/standing leg. It can be a quick kick or a powerful kick and can be used to cause damage or blast an opponent backwards. On the focus mitts this technique is usually practiced as an upward kick to the jaw.

“HOW TO ADD THIS”

Different variations of the front kick can simply be called during pad work. “Switch front kick”, “Snap front kick”, “Jump front kick” or the choice as to which kick they wish to use can be left to the person striking.

Drill 18. Different types of roundhouse kick

The roundhouse kick is the most common kick in both Kickboxing and MMA as it generates considerable power. There are of course many ways to perform the roundhouse kick, which can be delivered: either with the shin, as is popular in Thai Boxing; or with the foot, which is common in Karate and Kickboxing. Each has its benefits. The shin is a hard sharp bone so it tends to create a very solid striking surface, but a fighter has to get closer to deliver the shin kick. Conversely, landing the kick with the foot creates more whip and maximises distance from the opponent. The problem with using the foot is that the foot is comprised of many small bones and is sensitive to impact. In my opinion it is worth using both the shin and foot when kicking in order to have as many tools in the box as possible.

Down round kick

The downward round kick is a technique performed from high to low. Commonly targeted against the sciatic nerve on the outside of the thigh. Raising the leg up before chopping it down into the target creates momentum and adds gravity to the strike making it more powerful. Pulling the heel back towards the buttocks during the initiation of the kick also creates a stretch reflex on the thigh making the kick harder. Usually this kick is delivered with the shin bone at a 45° downwards angle and lands just above the knee for maximum effect. Repeated kicks thrown in this way over the course of two or three rounds result in an opponent’s leg muscles not working correctly. This takes away their ability to not only block the kick, but also their ability to strike back, or in MMA to attempt a take down. The secret to this kick is throwing it at a time when the opponent will find it difficult to block. This is when either the weight is on the lead leg which makes it difficult to lift or dodge, or when the opponent is stepping towards their left, which also prevents them from blocking.
Up round kick

The up round kick is usually used as a kick to the lower rib cage. If the opponent has a good guard, then their elbows will be down protecting the ribs. It is therefore necessary to launch this kick in a 45° upward direction with a straight leg so that the shin sneaks underneath the elbow and lands on the ribs. It is better to kick with the shin in this instance because if the opponent manages to tuck the elbow down to block it is far better to have a sore shin than a broken foot. The effectiveness of this technique can be increased by throwing a fake high first with the hands so that the opponent’s arms rise to block, therefore exposing the ribs to the up kick. Because of where this kick lands, sometimes it is easy for the opponent to catch, so special effort must be made to whip the leg back to the ground as soon as possible, to ensure that the leg is not caught.

Switch round kick

The technique for delivering this kick is identical to the mechanics of the switch front kick. The lead leg is switched in order to fake or generate power and then quickly swung into the target. The fighter is vulnerable during the switching movement so this needs to be performed quickly with at least one hand kept in front of the face to guard. The arms can also be used to generate momentum by pulling the kick into the target.

Flick round kick (not shown)

The flick round kick is popular in Kickboxing and differs from the switch round kick by using a quick snap of the knee to generate power. This kick is more of a quick kick than a power kick but its impact can be increased by timing so that the kick lands as the pad or opponent moves into it. Super foot Bill Wallace made this kick popular in the 1970s during the early days of full contact Karate. He was so effective using this kick that not many fighters could block it. Bill Wallace’s left roundhouse kick was once recorded at over 60 mph. The secret of this kick is not to give it away. Kick straight from the floor to the target, which can be the thigh, liver or side of head as directly as possible. Imagine kicking something hot so that the foot makes contact with the target for as short a time as possible before returning to the ground. This makes the kick very snappy and surprisingly powerful.
Jump round kick (not shown)

The jumping round kick is a more difficult kick to perform as it requires both a jump and a turn in the air. There are two ways to execute this kick. The first way involves a quick bend of both knees as a fake is thrown and then the fighter jumps and rotates in the air and lands the roundhouse kick. The second way, the lead knee is raised as a fake and with an explosive jump off the support leg, the kick is brought round in an arc. The first method requires more explosiveness to perform. The second kick is a bit easier for most people to perform, as raising one knee first helps generate momentum for the kick. As soon as the kick lands, the fighter must return to stance.

“How to add this”

As with the front kicks, round kick variations can be prompted at any time. Both the flick roundhouse kick and switch roundhouse kick are usually performed with the lead leg. The jump round kick is commonly done using the rear leg as this allows for the proper rotation of the hips into the kick.

Drill 19. Variations of sidekick

The sidekick is one of the most powerful kicks in Martial Arts, for two reasons. Firstly, the striking surface. The heel is a very hard part of the foot. Secondly, sidekicks use the hamstrings and glutes to generate force, which are some of the strongest muscles in the body. The only problem with this kick is that the person performing it needs to stand sideways to the target for it to be executed properly, which exposes a fighter to leg kicks and takedowns. The best time to use this kick is when the fighter is out of position. This usually happens as a result of a roundhouse kick missing the target and the fighter ending up sideways. A sidekick can be used to fill the gap instead, before returning to a front on stance.

Low sidekick

This technique, if applied with full power, is very effective and damaging to the knee. It is essentially a stomp performed to the opponent’s lead leg by lifting the knee and stomping downwards just above the knee. Ideally the heel should strike but any part of the sole will work. This kick is simple and easy to perform, whilst keeping the upper body leaning slightly away from any punches. It is commonly used by southpaw fighters targeting the lead leg of their orthodox opponent. Imagine stomping through a piece of wood wedged between a wall and the ground. Snap!
Rear leg sidekick

Most of the time the sidekick is done with your lead leg to the opponent’s leg or body. Occasionally it is appropriate to use the rear leg. The extra distance the kick travels makes it more powerful and the opponent commonly mistakes the body mechanics for a round kick. As with all the kicks, the hands need to be kept up in defence at all times.

Spin sidekick

The spinning sidekick is an advanced move that is popular in Kickboxing and is finding increasing favour in MMA. It is quite possibly one of the most powerful kicks as it uses strong leg muscles combined with centrifugal force to smash through whatever it hits. Nine times out of ten it is delivered to the body and will hurt no matter where it lands because it generates so much force. As it is a more technical kick it requires a few more steps than the basic sidekick. The front foot is turned or stepped across and as the shoulders rotate, the rear leg is drawn up and then extended in a straight line. As soon as the kick has landed the fighter can return to stance by following through or bouncing off the target and spinning back. In order to check whether the target has moved the athlete has to look over their shoulder as they spin or they may miss.

“How to Add This”

Holding the pads properly for sidekicks is important if the kick is to be performed correctly. The safest way for the pad holder to hold is to turn sideways, lift the left elbow so it is pointed towards the ceiling and protecting the face. The right pad is then placed behind the left pad to lend support with the elbow down to protect the body. Holding the pads in this manner helps keep the pad holder safe as inaccurate kicks will either miss or strike the arms instead of the head, body or groin. A single pad can be held on the inner or outer thigh when calling for a “low sidekick” or “rear leg sidekick”.

64 - 100 Essential Pad Drills
Stomp kick

The stomp is a downwards descending stamp predominantly using the rear leg. The knee is drawn up and the bottom of the foot is used to stamp downwards at 45° through the opponent’s lead leg. The toes are rotated out during the stomping motion to allow the heel to make contact. Fighters such as John Jones and Carlos Condit use this kick a lot to destabilise the lead leg and setup other striking techniques. This is a very strong kick so it needs to be practiced with care. If the pad holder does not brace their lead leg in anticipation of the kick the knee joint can be damaged (you have been warned). The pad holder’s leg needs to be kept bent with bodyweight on it to stop it hyper-extending backwards.

“How to add this”

Placing the pad on the lead leg above the knee with the palm facing out is the safest position for the stomp. Make sure the person striking builds up power gradually. This is a deceptively powerful kick.

Drill 20. Elbow blitz

If the pad holder calls for an elbow blitz, the following sequence of elbows is performed.
This drill should be performed fluidly and fast. Try to strike with the tip of the elbow on each technique as this increases the effectiveness of the strike. Beginners commonly strike with the forearm instead of the tip of the elbow. The pad holder will be able to feel immediately whether the tip of the elbow is impacting and can provide correction as needed. Keep the hands open in your gloves when performing elbows as this helps reduce tension in the arms, making elbow strikes quicker. This drill encourages the fighter to throw elbows in combination using different angles of attack.

“HOW TO ADD THIS”

Simply call “Elbow blitz” and keep your face out of the way.

Drill 21. Jump knees

Jump knees are a modern addition to Kickboxing and MMA. They are a dynamic and exciting technique if used correctly. They are also a risky manoeuvre as they require jumping into the air to deliver the knee. Watch the fight between Fedor Emelianenko and Andrei Arlovski in Affliction II to see how the jump knee can go spectacularly wrong. A jump knee should only be used when the opponent is already rocked, injured or is ducking down in defence.

Jump up knee

The jump up knee is delivered to the head. The simplest and most direct way to use this technique is with a quick bend of the knees combined with an explosive jump, whilst bringing the knee vertically up under the pad. Both hands can be placed on the top of the pads to increase the power by pulling them down into the rising knee.

Running jump forward knee

As described, this knee involves running forward into the opponent and jumping at the last second whilst delivering a knee to the body or head. Keep at least one hand up while performing this technique to avoid being counter struck on the way in. BJ Penn did this awesomely against Sean Sherk in UFC 84.

Double jump knee

This knee was made famous in MMA by UFC champion Jose Aldo, a Brazilian fighter who jumps in explosively and strikes with both knees whilst in the air. It can be performed with the left knee followed by the right knee, or the right knee followed by the left knee. Both knees aim to strike the target. The fighter then lands in a balanced stance, ready to milk the applause of the crowd or continue to strike.

Jump back curve knee

I learnt this technique from Chute Boxe coach Rafeal Cordeiro, who taught it at a seminar in London. It involves grabbing the opponent in the Thai clinch and delivering a series of skip knees to the body. As the opponent’s hands drop to defend the knees a jump backward curve knee is targeted to the temple area. This is a very unconventional technique and will catch many fighters unaware.
“HOW TO ADD THIS”
When using the pads the holder can call “Jump knee”, “Double jump knee” or “Running jump knee”.
**Triple trauma and triple threat**

Sometimes it is necessary to punch with the same hand more than once. Most Boxing and Kickboxing combinations alternate sides to help generate good mechanics. An example would be a combination of a left jab, right cross, left hook, right uppercut. The alternating nature of these punches helps the fighter torque and twist into the following punch and allows for a powerful shift of bodyweight. This is obviously a good thing, but it can become predictable. Sometimes it is necessary to strike with the same hand or leg repeatedly. This breaks the rhythm of the attack and confuses the opponent's defences.

The three simplest combinations that use this method are the triple jab, the triple trauma and the triple threat. The triple jab is simply a combination using the jab three times. All three jabs can go to the same target or they can work up and down the body as needed. This combination is most effective when the jabs are performed in quick succession with only a partial retraction of the hand. This is not a combination of three power jabs, but rather a quick blitz designed to create an opening for a more powerful punch to follow after.

**Drill 22.** Triple trauma is the name we have given to a powerful three punch combo using the power hand. This combination is cross, rear uppercut, cross. When a hard cross lands, it is common for the opponent to tuck into their guard to avoid further punishment, the uppercut is then used to lift the head in order to throw another cross. If the first cross misses because the opponent dips or slips to either side, the uppercut is used to line the opponent up for another cross.

**Drill 23.** The triple threat is a quick striking combination that uses the lead hand. It is a mixture of a jab, lead uppercut and lead hook. If the jab is thrown and the opponent ducks, the lead uppercut is used to bring their head back up for the lead hook. If the opponent slips to the side to avoid the jab, then a hook is used to bring the head into a position for an uppercut. Try not to load up on this combination as it requires speed rather than power work. As always the last punch of a combination is the power shot.
“HOW TO ADD THIS”
When using the pads the holder can call “Triple jab”, “Triple trauma”, or “Triple threat” and the fighter should follow up with the appropriate combination.

Liver combination 1,2,3

The liver is a large blood filled organ on the right-hand side of the body under the lower ribs. Kicks, punches and knees to the liver are all equally effective as the liver is extremely sensitive to impact. It is very difficult to continue fighting after a clean shot lands to the liver. It hurts so badly that all you can do is lay on the ground in a foetal position gently moaning. For this reason alone, it is worthwhile developing combinations that target this area.

Drill 24. Liver 1

Liver combination 1 is a Boxing combination that mixes punches to the liver with punches to the head. A jab is thrown at eye level to distract the opponent, while the lead foot starts to slide forward to the left. As the foot plants the knees bend and a right cross is thrown to the liver, followed by a left shovel hook to the liver. The shovel hook is an uppercut/hook that travels in a 45° upward direction through the body. As soon as the shovel hook lands the hand is retracted and a left short hook targeted to the head. A right hook is then thrown to the other side of the head and the body is dipped to the left again for another shovel hook. This combination is very effective as it mixes punches on different levels and generates powerful body mechanics.

Drill 25. Liver 2

Liver combination 2 is a Thai Boxing-based combination. It starts the same way as Liver 1, with a fake jab being thrown high, followed by a left step cross to the body and a shovel hook to the liver. The left hook is
also thrown to the head, but followed up with a grab and a left switch knee to the liver. The partner is then shoved away and a double left round kick thrown to the liver.

Drill 26. Liver 3
This sequence is from Kickboxing. As with the previous two liver combinations, it starts with the same punching setup; a fake jab, a right cross and shovel hook to the liver followed, by a left hook to the head. This time the momentum of the left hook is followed through into a spinning backfist, a right jump cross is executed and as soon as the feet touch the ground, a left round kick is directed at the liver. This combination is a little more technical and will require lots of repetition to perfect.
“HOW TO ADD THIS”

*During padwork the pad holder will only need to call “Liver 1”, “Liver 2” or “Liver 3” in order have the fighter apply these combos.*

Drill 27. Orthodox and southpaw leads

Some gyms and clubs only train fighters in orthodox stance (the left leg is forward, making the right hand the power punch), and some gyms work fighters in both leads. The reason that many gyms only train fighters in one lead is because they feel it will cause confusion and incorrect body mechanics if both sides are trained simultaneously. Proponents that favour instructing students in both leads claim that it develops more dexterity, and flexibility in style. Initially Mitt Master students train in their preferred lead and over time we introduce technical drills for both leads. This is because you cannot always guarantee which lead you will be in during the chaos of the fight and it is better in this situation to have the ability to keep striking until you get back to your preferred lead.

Training in both leads also gets you used to dealing with southpaws (left-handed fighters). Southpaws are usually considered difficult to deal with because their stance negates a lot of a right-hander’s techniques and requires a slightly different approach. If you are used to training in both leads, then a southpaw won’t present as much of a challenge.

It is also worth considering that the repetitive nature of Martial Arts training can create imbalances in the body if you don’t train both sides equally. Any movement that is trained on one side will create certain muscular anomalies and tensions that can affect functioning and lead to pain and injury. The body likes to be balanced, so using both leads spreads the training load over both sides of the body and balances muscles equally. Pad holding can also cause injuries if you only hold in one lead over months, years and decades. Many coaches have wrist, elbow and shoulder injuries on their right arms as a result of the years of repetitive impact from power punches. Switching leads spreads the load across the body and may help to prevent the repetitive strain injuries common in long-time trainers and coaches.

Once basic striking skills have been developed in the standard lead, learning how to do everything in the opposite lead is an important next step.
Once the basic attacking combinations have been mastered and combined with footwork and head movement in both leads, it’s time to start adding defensive movements into the pad drills. Initially it’s a good to start with blocking movements as they are the easiest to learn and most instinctual.

**Drill 28. Head blocking**

As most people will naturally block first (rather than parry, slip or destroy), blocking is the first defensive method taught in the Mitt Master system. Blocking, however, is the least efficient form of defence. While a block may stop the strike hitting its intended target it will not stop the force of the strike. Absorbing this impact uses up a lot of energy, reduces the muscles ability to work correctly and can be emotionally traumatic. It is far better to redirect or evade a strike than to block. Unfortunately, blocking is just hardwired into our nervous system. If someone swings a punch at a beginner who has had no training they will instinctively flinch and raise their arms up to block the punch. This flinch and block response, whilst sometimes effective, needs to be refined and tightened up to allow the athlete a better chance to block combinations.

We will start with learning how to block punches to the head first, as this is the most common target in sparring or fighting. It is always a good idea to protect the control centre (i.e. the brain) as damage elsewhere on the body is less serious. You can take many kicks to the leg if you are conditioned, but not many people can take repeated strikes to the head without it affecting their balance, co-ordination and ability to stay conscious. So our priority is to protect the brain first, as the brain controls everything else.

When blocking strikes to the head we use the gloves, forearms, and elbows to absorb the impact of the strike. The gloves are padded and protect the hands and head from damage, the forearms are hardened through years of receiving strikes and the elbows are sharp points which can smash and destroy the oncoming strike. It is best to block using the elbows as they are a solid, durable bone and are less likely to be damaged by receiving repeated strikes. In addition the sharp tip of the elbow can damage the oncoming strike. From personal experience even with 16 ounce gloves on, you can still feel an elbow on your knuckles if you are unfortunate enough to punch it. It is even possible to break your hand punching someone's elbow especially in 4oz MMA gloves. So the elbow is the blocking tool of choice most of the time. Sometimes, it may be difficult to get the elbows into a position to block all the strikes thrown, as the tip of the elbow is quite a small target. Accept that some of the time you will block using your gloves, some of the time you will block using your forearms, and some of the time you will block using the tip of your elbows.

When blocking kicks, punches, knees or elbows to the head, you need to make sure that the block is as tight and protected as possible. For example, when blocking a hook to the head, several things need to happen at the same time for the block to be effective. Tuck the chin down into the collarbone and raise your shoulders to protect the jaw. It is also necessary to brace and tighten the arm against the side of your
head and move slightly away from the direction of the force to minimise impact. All these things need to happen at precisely the same time in order for the block to work.

**Drill 29. Body blocking**

Strikes to the body can be as equally effective as strikes to the head. There are several key striking targets on the body that are worth highlighting. Most fighters in combat sports will be in good shape with a lot of muscle to protect their organs (meaning they have a six pack). Just smashing away at this muscular armour may not do the job. Is important to aim for spots on the body where the smallest impact will have the maximum effect. On most people the sensitive areas include the liver, the solar plexus, the spleen, and the bladder. Of these targets, the liver is usually the most effective when struck, because it is the largest body target; it is full of blood and nerves and it does not respond well to impact. For those of you lucky enough not to have been hit in the liver, I will describe how it feels. A second after the initial impact an excruciating pain will begin to build on the right hand side of your body. This pain will continue to get worse until all you can do is lay on the floor clutching your side and moaning gently like a sick child.

It is so painful that many fighters, such as former UFC champion Bas Rutten, have stated that he would rather be knocked out than take a hard liver shot. The funny thing about the liver shot is that after a couple of minutes you feel fine and can carry on as normal but by then it is usually too late, the fight is over. The spleen is also an effective target on the opposite side of the body to the liver, but it is smaller and much harder to accurately hit. The solar plexus, which is a little tab of cartilage at the bottom of the breastbone, is also a terrible place to be hit as it sends the diaphragm into spasm and stops your breathing. So if you want to avoid laying on the floor clutching your liver it is a good idea to learn how to defend body shots, whether they be punches, knees, or kicks.

Body shots take away a fighter’s gas tank, meaning they drain the energy reserves and open up other areas to strike. In most situations, maintaining the correct stance will help protect you from strikes to the body. By keeping your elbows low and tight to the sides of the ribs, your liver will stay protected. If the elbows leave your sides or flare out when striking, this can give an opponent the opportunity to counter to the liver or spleen easily. A fighter’s elbows should be pointed to the floor at all times to prevent this from happening. By turning the body slightly away from the partner, this will also prevent sensitive areas from being readily accessible to strike. If the feet are pointed forward, the upper body should be rotated 45° off line, taking the liver and several other key targets further away from the opponent.

The same principles apply to blocking body strikes as to blocking head strikes. You can block with the elbow, forearm or glove. The elbow is the most effective blocking surface, as anyone who has ever shin kicked an elbow will tell you. Remember to tuck, tighten and move away from the force of the strike. Never stand in front of a good body puncher and allow them to repeatedly strike at the body without blocking, countering or moving. Repeated strikes to the body drain a fighters energy and desire, so it is vital to protect the body at all times.
**Drill 30. Shin blocking**

Shin blocking is painful. Well at least at the beginning it is. After a few years of blocking shins during training and competition the nerves deaden to the pain and an experienced competitor can continue to fight. In the beginning though, it really, really hurts. It is far better to try and block kicks with the tip of the knee rather than the shin bone but this requires better accuracy and timing, so it is necessary to accept that you may have to block shin to shin. There are various ways to shin block: you can shin block hard; you can shin block soft; you can shin block attacking; or you can shin block defending. Shin blocking hard means stiffening up the blocking leg making it rigid like a wall to block the incoming strike. Shin blocking soft means still blocking with the shin, but also curling the heel back toward the buttocks as the kick impacts in order to take some of the sting out of the block. Be careful though, because this can lead to the opponent kicking under the blocking leg and sweeping out your standing leg. Shin block attacking is an aggressive hop forward at the same time as the shin blocks. It is designed to destabilise and disturb the opponent’s balance as they will be on one leg kicking. By hopping forwards with the shin block it can knock the opponent back of balance halting their attack and leaving them vulnerable to counters. Shin block defending is the exact opposite of shin block attacking and uses a hop away from the power of the kick as the shin blocks. Each type of shin block has its time to be used, so make sure to drill all four variations. For example against a very aggressive opponent who has hard leg kicks it may be an idea to shin block in a defensive manner moving away from the force. Alternatively it may be preferable to hop into their kick, smothering the technique and limiting its acceleration. Experiment with the different types of shin blocks and apply them during sparring to see which work best for you.

The shins can be conditioned to get used to the impact of shin blocking by kicking pads, kicking a good heavy bag and by sparring. This takes time as the skin toughens and the bone thickens, so don’t expect iron hard shins overnight. Don’t do anything stupid like go and kick trees or walls as a friend of mine did many years ago, it can cause stress fractures in your shins and eventually lead to bone cancer. The bones will naturally harden as a result of the impact from pad and bag training and the nerves will get used to the pain over time. As with blocking in general, it is a better idea to evade or redirect the strike so that you do not receive any impact or pain and can counter effectively. But sometimes a block is the only option, so man up and take the pain!

---

**“HOW TO ADD THIS”**

Blocking can be added simply. Either by having the pad holder strike at the opponent’s head, body or legs, forcing them to block; or by the pad holder calling “Head block”, “Body block” or “Shin block”, giving the striker more time to prepare to defend. The call method is more appropriate for beginners as it gives them time to work out what is happening and the appropriate response. More experienced fighters can be struck back any time by the pad holder, as they should have the ability to quickly recognise the approaching strike and perform the correct block.
**Catching kicks**

Catching kicks often happens unintentionally as a result of a kick landing on the body and the hand instinctively grabbing the leg. Once the leg is caught, immediately counter with either a punch to the head or a kick to the supporting leg. A punch to the face will keep the opponent busy while you work out what to do next, or a kick to the supporting leg will leave your opponent off-balance and possibly sweep them. There are various ways to catch a kick. 1. Wrap your arm over the leg; 2. Wrap your arm under the leg; 3. Catch hold of the heel.

**Drill 31. Wrap.** When you wrap over the leg, make sure you hold the leg tight as any space will allow the partner to twist or rip their leg back out. At the same time, try to lift the leg as high as possible to put your opponent off-balance, as their ability to counter will be minimised. Lifting the leg high will start to make them hop and therefore makes the kick to the supporting leg a target to be swept. As mentioned, it is essential to counter quickly, as the opponent is in a very vulnerable position when stood on one leg. Punching with the other hand is always good, or it is also possible to grab and knee, elbow the thigh or take them down off a caught kick.

**Drill 32. Shelf.** The same principles apply when grabbing from under the leg, but make sure that the other hand checks the shin as you wrap, as a skilled kicker may be able to kick over the arm and into your head. So pat the shin as the arm closest to the leg wraps from underneath. Immediately counter with either a punch, knee to the body or a kick to the support leg.

**Drill 33. Catch.** The heel catch tends to happen when the partner front kicks or sidekicks. Sometimes the kick lands on the belly and the hands instinctively grab the heel, but it is preferable to take a half step back away from the kick and catch the heel. Do not keep the opponent’s foot in front of your body after catching, as it gives them the opportunity to push kick to your body and escape. Whilst holding their heel, pull their leg slightly to the side and counter with a punch to the head or a kick to the support leg.

In order to avoid having your kicks caught, try to set them up with punches first so they are less likely to be anticipated. A single kick thrown without a setup is easy to recognise and catch as kicks are generally slower in comparison to punches. Kicks must be set up with a flurry of punches first or a fake and feint to disguise the kicks initiation. Secondly, work on the retraction of the kick, meaning how fast the kick returns back to the ground. It is very common for beginners to throw the kick fast but return to stance slowly.
This time lag allows the partner to catch the kick. My coach Erik Paulson always said, “If it goes out at 100 it returns at 150”. This helps you avoid the kick being caught but also creates a whipping effect which increases a kick’s power.

If your kick does get caught there are a few simple ways to free a trapped leg. We will discuss the round kick caught in an over-wrap as this is the most common situation where a kick is caught. As soon as the kick is wrapped and before the opponent has a chance to tighten up their grip, it is possible to escape by twisting the knee downward and away to pull the foot out. Make sure you have your hands up when you do this and create distance by simultaneously stepping away so they cannot counter.

If it is impossible to twist out then the only other way out is forward. Do this by blocking any punches being thrown and hop forward whilst kicking the trapped leg further through their arm, until the back of the knee is resting on their forearm with the toes pointed to the ground. Grab their head with both hands in the Thai plumm and kick the leg back and down to the ground hard to escape. It is useful to visualise kickstarting a motorbike to get a feel for this technique.

**“HOW TO ADD THIS”**

_During padwork the pad holder will deliver a right round kick to the body of the striker. The striker then either over wraps, under wraps or catches the heel and follows up._

---

**Drill 34. Cut kicking**

A cut kick is used to destabilise the supporting leg or sweep and there are various ways to cut kick the standing leg. The following techniques are demonstrated against a right roundhouse kick. Whichever cut kick is performed, a fighter must remember to keep at least one hand up protecting against punches at all times. The fighter whose leg is caught will be desperate to get their leg back on the ground and recover balance; they will, therefore, throw lots of punches in order to get their leg free.

**Cut kick 1**

This cut kick is thrown behind the knee in the same direction as the opponent’s kick.

It is delivered with the left leg striking behind the opponent’s knee. As it lands behind the knee, it may cause it to collapse and in some cases damage the ligaments. This cut kick often results in the pad holder being swept from their feet to land in a heap on the floor.
Cut kick 2

This cut kick is thrown in the opposite direction to cut kick 1 and with the right leg. The right kick is blocked with both elbows and a right round kick is aimed across the top of the thigh just above the knee. This kick will not sweep an opponent as their leg will not bend that way, but it will damage the leg muscles making movement harder as the fight progresses.

Cut kick 3

This kick is taken from Savate, the French Kickboxing style. When blocking the right round kick with the left arm the body is turned to the right as a left sidekick is directed to the knee. As the heel is striking the inner thigh, this kick is extremely painful for the person receiving it and should be used carefully in training.

Cut kick 4

This cut kick is a stomping movement with the heel of the right leg. As the right round kick is blocked, the toes are turned outward and the right stomp is aimed above the knee. This is also a very painful and powerful technique so should be used with control.

“How to Add This”

These four cut kicks can be used during training by simply having the pad person call “Cut 1, 2, 3 or 4” and then throwing a right roundhouse kick to the body, which the striker will catch or block and then perform the corresponding cut kick. Follow-ups from the cut kick usually involve a punching combination that can be initiated by either hand.

Drill 35. Slipping

Slipping means avoiding a strike by moving the head, body or leg just out of the way of an attack. It is a commonly used term in Boxing for avoiding punches by using evasive head movement. Try to avoid over-slipping, dropping one or both hands, or losing your balance. Over slipping refers to moving the head too far to either side, which takes a fighter out of position and inhibits their ability to counter-attack. When slipping, the expression “An inch is as good as a mile” is relevant. The punch or kick should miss by the smallest margin possible. If you move your head three feet to the right to avoid a punch, your opponent...
will notice you over-committing, so the next time you
do it there will be a shin waiting for your head. The
best way to practice slipping is on the focus mitts, by
having the holder slowly throw straight punches at
regular intervals during your padwork. After getting hit
a few times you will start moving your head to avoid to
strikes.

In the beginning is quite common for people to move
too much to avoid the strike, but over time they get
more comfortable with punches flying at them and they
relax and refine their movements. After a few months
of practice most people can recognise and slip straight
punches by a few inches.

The body mechanics of slipping sometimes
encourage fighters to drop their hands whilst
slipping. Dropping the hands whilst slipping is
detrimental as it gives an opponent the space to
grab or off-balance. Keep both hands in a good
position touching the sides of the face just under
the cheekbones whilst slipping. This will allow quick
counters and limit any options your opponent has
for following up.

Finally make sure balance is never compromised
when slipping. It is quite easy to over-commit the
upper body and fall to either side. Try to keep the
movements small and under control, returning to
stance as soon as possible. It is imperative to be
balanced at all times when training or fighting. Any
loss of balance will limit one’s ability to attack or
defend. Also, when the body is off-balance the brain’s
priority is to regain balance, and therefore you
cannot be thinking effectively or strategically about
the fight; try to stay balanced at all times.

Drill 36. Rolling

Rolling is an American term for what British Boxers call bobbing and weaving. Both terms are used to
describe circular evasive head movement. This type of head movement is especially effective when dealing
with hooking or looping punches, as it allows a fighter to move inside and under a hook. Rolling is a
technique that can be done with either the neck, shoulders, back or legs. It can also be done with the whole
body acting as a co-ordinated unit. The most important thing to remember when rolling is to maintain
a good guard. Hands should be up, chin should be down and elbows tucked tightly to the body. This will
prevent any counters landing while the person is rolling.

The term bob and weave accurately describes the movement used when rolling. The bob part refers to
moving the head away from the strike and the weave to moving the head in a U shape, ducking under the strike and returning to stance. When combined, the bob and weave moves the head away from a hook, under it and out the other side. The only problem with rolling (bobbing and weaving) is what happens if the person moves the wrong way, essentially bobbing into the strike. For this reason many fighters prefer to duck rather than roll.

**Drill 37. Ducking**

Ducking is more simple than rolling and involves a vertical drop of the body usually performed by bending the knees. From the regular stance the fighter drops vertically under the strike, letting it miss by the smallest margin possible. Dropping too low will result in an uppercut in Boxing or a knee to the face in Muay Thai. The strike should just pass over head, brushing the hair on top of the head as it misses. Try to keep the body upright when ducking, as this avoids bringing the face closer to the opponent. It also makes the duck more efficient; making it faster, allowing for a quick, effective counter.

**“HOW TO ADD THIS”**

Slips and rolls can be called at any time during padwork, or the pad holder can give an over exaggerated strike which can be easily recognised and avoided. For example, the pad holder throws a wide hook, which gives the striker time to recognise the oncoming hook and, therefore, roll underneath it. Follow-ups depend upon which direction the person has slipped or rolled.

In an orthodox lead if a person has slipped a jab to their right, then a cross, hook, cross is an effective follow-up.

If the person has slipped to their left to avoid a cross then a hook, cross, hook is an efficient follow-up.

**Drill 38. Parrying**

Parrying is a defensive movement that uses a quick deflection by the hands to redirect a strike. Parrying a strike is better than blocking a strike as a parry redirects the punch or kick off-target and, therefore, avoids the fighter receiving any impact. Parrying takes a lot more training than blocking, but with a little practice is easily integrated into an effective defensive strategy. Parrying also requires better timing than blocking as it is necessary to intercept the attack.
at precisely the right moment to avoid over parrying or under parrying. Over parrying means reaching too far to redirect the strike, which may leave you open on another line to a different attack. Parrying should be kept as small as possible with minimal movement. Big swatting movements will open you up. It is best to imagine brushing a fly off your nose. You don’t need to take a massive swing at a fly on your nose, just a little brush away will deal with the problem.

This applies to parrying punches or kicks, it does not take a lot of energy to redirect a strike. In the beginning it is tempting to over-react and put too much power into a parry. This is because the fear of getting hit causes the person to panic and swing wildly at the approaching arm. Fortunately after a little training, the technique becomes refined, until it is as efficient as possible and uses the minimum amount of movement / energy to be performed correctly. The opposite of over parrying is under parrying, where not enough force is used to redirect the strike and the strike continues onto its intended target. Different strikes require different amounts of force to redirect. Generally kicks require more force than punches. Practicing with a co-operative partner will allow students to learn the correct amount of force required. It is preferable to parry with one hand or arm at a time, leaving the other arm to counter-attack. This is the main reason why parrying is more effective than blocking, because blocking frequently requires both arms to be involved in the defensive move, while a parry leaves one hand free. The parry can also set the opponent off-balance, which helps lengthen their reaction time, giving you more time to attack.

**Drill 39. Scooping**

Scooping is a circular redirection of a strike, similar to a parry, but designed to open up an opponent’s guard. Against a jab, it is possible to scoop with either hand. It is more risky to scoop against a cross as this is a committed and powerful punch and if the scoop goes wrong you end up eating knuckles. Where scoops really come into their own is against kicks. Any kick that is caught can be thrown or scooped in different directions leaving the opponent open to counters with both hands and feet. The easiest technique to apply a scoop against is the front kick, where the heel is caught in the palm of the glove and the leg is scooped to either side. This helps destroy balance, reduces possible follow-ups and opens the guard. Most kicks can be scooped including front kicks, roundhouse kicks, and sidekicks. The only problem with scooping kicks is the momentum created by the scoop can be used by the opponent to turn into a spinning technique, such as a spin back fist or spin side kick. Therefore, keep the other hand up in guard position to defend any possible spinning counter-attacks. These counters can be minimised by scooping your partner off-balance so that they cannot easily recover and use a spinning technique.
“HOW TO ADD THIS”

Parries are most effective against straight punches. The pad holder calls “Parry” and delivers either a jab or a cross to the head, which the striker parries.

Scoops are also easy to perform on straight punches. So the pad holder now will now call “Scoop” and once again deliver a jab or a cross to the head. The striker will then scoop the punch away and follow-up.

Destructions

Destructions are a concept taken from Filipino Martial Arts. The Filipino arts have a expression: “To de-fang the snake”, which means that a poisonous snake is harmless without its fangs. The Filipino Martial Arts are weapons-based styles so as soon as you dis-arm, or ‘de-fang’ your opponent it leaves them at your mercy. This concept of destruction can also be applied to non-weapons-based Martial Arts. Using the elbow, knee or the skull to smash and destroy approaching techniques essentially disarms the attacker and may prevent further strikes landing. The striking surfaces (the hands and feet) tend to be prone to injury if clean contact is not made with the desired target. For example, if a person aims a punch at the abdomen and an elbow is placed in its path the small bones of the hands are prone to fracture or ligament damage. This also applies to kicks thrown to the body where an elbow can intercept the foot and cause serious damage. Kicks to the legs can be blocked with the tip of the knee, resulting in pain and possible impact trauma. Anyone who has trained in Thai Boxing or MMA knows the pain of kicking an elbow with your foot or getting a sharp knee to the shin. There are even a few nasty videos on YouTube of fighter’s shin bones snapping when contacting a knee. Destructions are very effective because they cause damage and pain to the person striking, whilst protecting the person defending.

Drill 40. Destruction 1: Top of head

This is a last ditch defensive tactic. The opponent has punched and their fist is about to land on your nose. Rather than take the punch on the nose where it may cause serious damage, the fighter has the option to tuck their chin and absorb the force of the strike on the top of their head. This part of the skull is extremely thick and can absorb a lot of punishment. This is obviously the last option, as it is never a good idea to take a punch anywhere, but if the hands are elsewhere and there is only a fraction of a second before the strike hits, tucking up and dropping the chin will protect the soft tissues of the face and smash the opponent’s fist on the skull.

Drill 41. Destruction 2: Elbow

The tip of the elbow can be used to intercept the oncoming punch causing damage to the opponent’s hand. A little bit of training is needed to accurately use the tip of the elbow but after a while this block is easily used and very effective, especially in MMA where the gloves only offer 4 ounces of protection. This means the bones of the hand are vulnerable to breaking
when they contact something as hard as an elbow. Deliberately using the elbow as a destructive tool is very useful as it hurts the opponent, whilst minimising damage to the person receiving the punch. The elbow destruction is the easiest and most effective destruction to apply.

**Drill 42. Destruction 3: Knee**

This is a technique from Filipino Martial Arts, where the jab is caught with both hands and sharply pulled down onto a rising knee. The knee can strike the fist, wrist or forearm, damaging bones and ligaments. Personally I only perform this technique against a long range jab as there is little risk if it goes wrong. It is possible to use against a cross but there is more chance of it impacting your face if the timing is off. As soon as the hands have pulled the jab down onto the knee, they must instantly return back to guard against any follow-up punches.

**Drill 43. Destruction 4: Hook to bicep**

This destruction is a variation of a technique taught in Filipino Martial Arts called a “gunting” which means scissors. Traditionally taught using the second knuckles to strike the nerves in the upper arm, a simpler option is to left hook the pad holder’s oncoming jab. A short tight hook to the nerves between the bicep and tricep can immobilise the arm or open the opponent up for follow-ups straight down the middle. If the person performing this technique tries to stay directly in front of the jab there is a chance they will get hit. It is far safer to slip to the right at the same time as hooking, as this reduces the risk of getting a fat lip if things go wrong. This destruction is particularly effective when wearing MMA gloves as they allow the knuckles to dig deeply into the bicep impacting the nerves and affecting the function of the arm. A little bit of practice is needed to target the exact area but as with anything regular practice will increase accuracy and effectiveness. If this drill is repeated frequently it can get very painful for the pad holder, so they may wish to place the right pad on the bicep, enabling the striker to hit with full force and not damage the arm.

**Drill 44. Destruction 5: Uppercut to tricep**

Similar to the last drill but an uppercut is used to strike the tricep instead. Once again the head is moved off-line to minimise risk and a left or right uppercut is directed to the pad holder’s tricep or elbow joint as they jab. A pad can be placed under the arm to protect the pad holder’s muscles from repeated impact. Start slowly and build up speed as accuracy increases.
“HOW TO ADD THIS”

The pad holder simply calls “Destruction” and jabs at the striker, who can then decide which destruction to use; the head, the elbow or the knee. The destruction should always be directed onto the focus mitt to protect the pad holder. There is no point in damaging your pad holder so be careful when using destructions. An injured pad holder can’t hold pads, so treat them with respect.
Accuracy

One of the most important advantages of padwork over bag work is that it develops accuracy. Accuracy simply means the ability to hit the target. As focus mitts are small and can be moved into a variety of positions quickly they are a very effective tool for training accuracy. The punch-bag, because of its very nature, is a large target and hitting it anywhere will produce an effect. This is very different from hitting a person who is tucked in a defensive stance and only presenting small targets.

A strike has to be fast, direct and powerful but also accurate as striking the wrong area or missing the target will negate much of the strike's effect. Focus mitts with their small surface area really encourage accurate striking. But of course there are extra drills that can be used to further improve accuracy.

Drill 45. Wobble pad drill

The wobble pad drill was taught to me by Jeet Kune Do Master Bob Breen. It involves the person holding the pads keeping their wrist totally relaxed so that any strike that does not cleanly hit the middle of the pad will result in the pad rotating around it axis. This tells the fighter they are being inaccurate. Do not strike with full power during this drill as the trainer's arm is relaxed and could be damaged. This drill is purely for training speed and accuracy.

Drill 46. Smaller pads

Another way of improving accuracy is by using smaller focus mitts. Big focus mitts tend to be good for soaking up lots of punishment from heavy strikers but many trainers are also using smaller palm size focus mitts to make sure their fighters can accurately hit small targets such as the jaw, liver or solar plexus. The disadvantage of smaller pads is that they do not offer as much protection, so they are not really appropriate for knees, kicks or power punches. Occasionally though these pads are good to help sharpen a fighter’s accuracy.

Drill 47. Tracking pad drill

This drill involves the pad holder moving the pads during combinations. This encourages the striker to adjust and accurately track moving targets. In the beginning it is easiest to work this drill with the jab and a single pad. The pad is held up and then moved in random patterns mimicking the head movement of an elusive opponent. Once the striker is comfortable hitting one moving pad, both pads can be used. Be wary of over-extending the elbow when attempting to strike a moving pad.

Top Training Tip

Sports drinks are only necessary if you are training intensely for over 90 minutes. Otherwise they are just extra calories you don't need. Stick to water most of the time.
SECTORING

Sectors are a concept I learnt from my JKD training. Sectors concern the position of your hands in relation to your partner’s arms. For example, if both your hands happen to be outside your partner’s jab as he punches, then the follow-ups you can do from this position are different from what is possible if your hands are inside your partner’s jab. Different hand positions have different follow-ups based on what is the most economical movement from that position. Economy of motion is important as it makes you both direct and fast. Sectoring is an important skill to learn because it allows you to counter-attack quickly with the most efficient combination possible at the time. There are eight basic sectors in the Mitt Master system. Four which counter the jab, and four that counter the cross.

Drill 48. The four sectors for countering the jab are:

- **Sector 1**: Both your hands are outside the jab (follow up with a cross over the jab)
- **Sector 2**: One-handed either side of the jab (follow up with split jab)
- **Sector 3**: Both your hands are inside the jab (follow up with a cross from inside the jab)
- **Sector 4**: Both your hands under the jab (follow up by ducking and jabbing the body)
Drill 49. The four sectors for countering the cross are:

**Sector 5**
Both your hands inside the cross
(follow up with jab inside the cross)

**Sector 6**
One hand either side of the cross
(follow up with a split cross)

**Sector 7**
Both your hands outside the cross
(follow up with a cover & left hook)

**Sector 8**
Both your hands under the cross
(follow up by ducking and crossing to the body)

Students often ask “But why would my hands be in this position?”. Because sometimes that’s the place you find yourself as a result of the chaos of combat. Weird things happen in sparring or competition. I suggest you film yourself sparring and note all the times your hands are out of position or in non traditional places. You will be surprised.

In these situations you have a choice, either to punch from the odd position or reset yourself to punch from a more neutral position (such as guard). It’s good to have the ability to strike back from wherever you happen to be as this makes you a more unpredictable fighter. All top level fighters have the ability to strike from odd positions and angles, and this is a skill that can be developed through training.
**RHYTHM DRILL**

Once the basic defensive techniques of blocking, slipping and rolling have been learnt, repetition is needed in order to make them an integrated part of a fighter’s skill set. The best drill to provide the high level of repetition needed is the rhythm drill.

**Drill 50.** The rhythm drill is used to maximise repetition of defensive skills such as basic blocks, slips and rolls. The fighter throws continuous jab, cross punches at a quick pace. At anytime the pad holder can throw either:

A. A left body hook  
B. A right body hook  
C. A left head hook  
D. A right head hook  
E. A left jab  
F. A right cross

The fighter has an option to either maintain a tight guard and block the strike or practice evasions and slip or roll. Let’s look at blocks first.

**Drill 51. Blocks**

A. The left body hook is covered with the elbow and followed up with a left uppercut, right uppercut, left hook, right cross.

B. The right body hook is covered with the elbow and followed up with a right uppercut, left uppercut, right cross, left hook.

C. The left head hook is covered and followed up with a left hook, right cross, left hook.

D. The right head hook is covered and followed up with a right cross, left hook, right cross.

This completes the hook blocks.

**Drill 52. Rolls**

On the head hook defences, there is also the option to roll as well.

C. The left head hook is rolled and followed up with a right cross, left hook, right cross.

D. The right head hook is rolled and followed up with a left hook, right cross, left hook.

**Drill 53. Slipping**

Against the jab and cross, the fighters work on slipping to the side to avoid the punches.

E. The jab is slipped to the right and followed up with a right cross, left hook, right cross.

F. The cross is slipped and followed up with a left hook, right cross, left hook.
• All these variations are trained slowly at first, in the order presented above, during the rhythm drill.
• Once these blocks, slips & rolls are mastered in sequence, they can be practiced at random.
• The attacks are blocked and countered with the same hand first, so if a student blocks with their left hand, they throw a left back first.
• To help differentiate the covers from the rolls, the hook for the roll is usually thrown wider to give the fighter a different stimulus.

**Drill 54. Opposite blocking**

Sometimes it is necessary to block with one arm and counter with the other hand.

A. The opponent’s left body hook is blocked and followed up with a left uppercut, right uppercut, left hook, right cross.

B. The opponent’s right body hook is blocked and followed up with a right uppercut, left uppercut, right cross & left hook.

C. The opponent’s left head hook is blocked and followed up with a left hook, right cross, left hook.

D. The opponent’s right head hook is blocked and followed up with a right cross, left hook, right cross.

All the pad holder has to do is strike at the appropriate target and call “Same” or “Opposite”. Same means block and counter back with the same side and opposite means block with one side and counter back on the other side. The rhythm drill is a great drill for helping the fighter to practice defensive skills repetitively. Continual punching mixed in with covers, rolls, slips and counters with both hands will develop quick hands, fast reactions and trains automatic defences with follow ups.

```
“HOW TO ADD THIS”

The pad holder can call rhythm drill at any time and the striker starts delivering jabs and crosses in a rhythmical fashion. The pad holder can strike back at any time to the body or head in order to trigger body covers and head covers. If the pad holder calls “Opposite” as they strike, the follow-up is initiated with the opposite hand to the one that blocked. So if the left arm blocks, the follow-up is started with the right arm first.
```

**Drill 55. Defensive distance drill**

Defence is often a matter of distance. Staying too close to an opponent reduces the reaction time available to block, evade or destroy. Conversely, being too far away from an opponent makes attacking difficult, as one has to step into range to strike, which telegraphs the attack. For any technique it is necessary to maintain the optimal distance for that technique to work. The defensive distance drill was designed to develop a fighter’s sensitivity to the importance of distance. It is also a mirrored drill where the striker and pad holder perform the same techniques, making it easy to learn.
The emphasis on this drill is on moving just far enough back to evade the strike but staying close enough to strike back quickly. Snapping back out of distance can be performed leaning the upper body back or dropping the rear heel to recline the body away. Sometimes both can be combined with the head snapping back and the heel dropping to pull the fighter from danger. Whichever method is used, the pad holder’s punches should miss by the smallest margin possible. Imagine having a beard (if you don’t have one) and the punches just grazing the whiskers. In the beginning the natural reaction is to jump away from the oncoming strike, creating too much distance, but with regular training this over-reaction can be minimised so that the punches eventually miss by fractions of an inch.
Timing is everything in Martial Arts, competition and life. I remember Bill Wallace, one of the first ever Kickboxing champions telling me: “Cooking a steak, kissing a girl or kicking a person in the head…it is all about timing”. Without timing, a Martial Artist will always be out of position and have a hard time (no pun intended), applying the techniques not only on the pads, but also when sparring with a partner or fighting in the ring and cage.

There is always a perfect time to strike. If the punch or kick is executed too early it will not generate maximum leverage and power. If the strike is delivered too late it will be over-extended and weak. If the technique is performed at the right time it will feel like punching or kicking through butter; there is no sensation of impact just a smooth powerful strike that results in a knockdown or knockout. Bingo! There are various drills that I have developed, or stolen, to help refine timing when hitting pads.

The simplest timing drill is to hold up a focus mitt out of distance. The holder then moves towards the striker and the striker has to hit the pad at the right time with a jab or cross. If the strike is too early the pad will still be out of distance and they will over-commit and over-extend. If the strike is too late the striker will not be able to fully extend their arm and will end with a shortened punch that lacks power. If they punch at precisely the right time, they will hit the pad as it is coming towards them at maximum extension with good body mechanics and it will feel perfect to both the pad holder and striker. Constant feedback from the pad holder is necessary to get the best from this drill.

**Drill 56. Belly pad timing drills**

For timing drills using kicks, the belly pad is a useful piece of kit as it keeps the pad holder’s hands free to hold pads, while kicks can be delivered to the belly pad at any time. A simple drill has the pad holder (wearing a belly pad and focus mitts) moving in and out of distance, whilst holding the mitts for various combinations. In between punching the pads the striker can use a defensive front kick on the belly pad at any time. A defensive front kick is used to push the pad holder back whenever they get too close, or they can chase the pad holder with a jump front kick. Once the front kick has been integrated, the round kick can be added, followed by the side kick. Using the belly pad in this way really enhances training as timing is developed whilst integrating punching and kicking skills.

**Balance and focus mitt training**

Balance refers to the ability of a fighter to maintain a stable stance, whether they are punching, kicking or clinching. All good fighters have excellent balance, they are able to perform techniques with great speed and power and can recover their balance quickly and easily. In Martial Arts, a lot of the time is spent being off-balance. Missed kicks or punches frequently throw a fighter off-balance, as can evading an opponent’s strikes. Having the ability to strike when off-balance and immediately catch one’s balance is fundamental. There are several simple focus mitt drills used for improving balance.
Drill 57. Striking with leg caught

At some time or another your leg will get caught intentionally or accidentally by a sparring partner or opponent. At this point, the benefit of being able to strike effectively whilst hopping about on one foot becomes apparent. If you cannot free the trapped leg, then the only other option is to strike the opponent; the aim is to make them drop your leg. This is worth practising on the focus mitts by allowing the pad holder to catch and wrap a kick. The pad holder then holds up a single pad and allows the striker to practice straight punches first. Once the fighter is comfortable doing this on the spot, the pad holder can now drag the fighter around forcing them to hop and adjust whilst striking. As soon as the fighter is proficient at moving and firing straight punches on one leg, hooks and uppercuts are added.

Drill 58. Leg checking and kicking

In Thai Boxing, leg checking, or shin blocking as it is also known, is the preferred method of blocking low kicks. As soon as the kick is blocked the foot is usually returned to the ground. While lifting the leg to block is a good defensive movement, returning it to the ground without actually causing any damage is less efficient. By raising the knee to block the kick, the leg can be used to counter immediately, rather than passively put back on the floor. The three most effective follow-ups from the shin check are the front kick, the round kick and the side kick. The shin is raised to block the oncoming kick and before the opponent puts their foot back on the ground a kick is quickly delivered. This is easily done if the pad holder expects the return or it can be performed on a belly pad by the fighter any time they shin check. This really tests the fighter’s balance as they have to receive the force of the kick, block it and counter back before putting their foot down. Initially this may be a challenging drill as the force of the kick throws the fighter off-balance, preventing the delivery of a quick counter kick. As with all difficult techniques regular practice makes things easier and balance will improve over time.

Speed and focus mitt training

Speed can be broken down into three interlinked components: recognition speed, processing speed and reaction speed. Recognition speed refers to the fighter’s ability to recognise a stimulus such as a punch flying towards the face. The fighter then needs processing speed to process this information and make a decision. Finally, reaction speed is needed to perform the blocking technique required. This entire process happens in a fraction of a second, but each individual element can be trained separately or all together to improve overall speed.
**Drill 59. Initiation speed**

The most basic focus mitt drill to develop recognition and reaction speed is the flash pad drill. This drill is performed by having the pad holder flash the pad up quickly so that the striker has to respond to the stimulus with the correct technique at the appropriate time as fast as possible. The pad is kept in position for the shortest time possible before the next technique is flashed up. As the person striking increases their reaction speed, the time the pad is held up is reduced, until it is flashed up for a fraction of a second and the technique is delivered. This drill can be applied to any technique whether it be a kick, punch or takedown.

**Drill 60. Retraction speed**

Once reaction speed is developed it is necessary to work on retraction speed. Getting the hand back to guard or the foot back on the ground after a kick is necessary to avoid getting countered. It is very common for beginners to punch quickly but return to guard slowly. Slow retraction leaves a fighter open to counter punches or kicks. Getting the hand back into a position to protect is common sense and fortunately for you, is easy to train on the pads.

Starting with the jab and cross, the pad holder tries to hit the punching arm with the other pad quickly as soon as the striker makes contact encouraging a quick return to guard. The same method can be applied to kicks. If the pad holder can tap the striker’s leg after the kick has landed then retraction speed needs improving. MMA students can also use this drill for speeding up their knee strikes and kicks. A slow knee or kick in MMA is very risky as the opponent can catch hold of the leg before it returns the ground and get a takedown. Getting the foot back on the ground quickly will help with defensive footwork or sprawling. Start these drills at half speed until the striker is comfortable and over a round or two increase to full speed. It can be made more challenging by using combinations of hands and feet or by making the striker perform a forfeit such as burpees if they get caught.

The most important factor when performing speed drills is to make sure that technique does not start to deteriorate as a result of performing the drill. Fighters trying to strike faster and faster will start to minimise their movements or change their body mechanics to complete the drill as quickly as possible. The pad holder needs to notice when there is any change in the correct performance of the technique and encourage their partner to keep good form at all times.

Speed training should also only be performed when the athlete is fresh, as a tired athlete is rarely a fast athlete. In order to be fast, the body needs to be fresh and the nervous system relaxed and ready. When a person is physically or mentally tired the body cannot work at its maximum potential. It is best to save speed training for another session.
**More Complex Speed drills**

It is best to work on simple speed drills first, as they do not require as much co-ordination as more advanced pad drills. That way the fighter can focus on improving speed rather than memorising a long combination. In the following more complex drills, the emphasis is on completing the drill as fast as possible with good form and body mechanics. If every technique in the drill is not performed correctly it is not counted. The pad holder has a responsibility to monitor all the techniques performed to make sure they are executed well.

**Drill 61. Speed drill 1**

This is a very simple drill that requires the fighter to perform 10 straight punches as fast as possible. It is limited to 10 punches as it is very unlikely that a fighter will throw a combination of more than 10 techniques without having to move or cover. Of course it is possible to perform the drill with more punches, but at some point a certain number of punches will force the striker to pace themselves in order to complete the drill, which will slow the techniques down. Better to work on short intense bursts of speed.

**Drill 62. Speed drill 2**

This drill involves the fighter throwing six hooks. The first hook is a left hook delivered to the body and the subsequent hooks alternate up the body as follows:

- Left hook to lower ribs
- Right hook to lower ribs
- Left hook to chest
- Right hook to chest
- Left hook to head
- Right hook to head

Each hook needs to be delivered with good technique and rotation of the feet and hips into each punch.

**Drill 63. Speed drill 3**

The next speed drill focuses on uppercuts. Five uppercuts are performed using the left-hand first and alternating sides. The first uppercut is low to the body and following punches work up to head height. After the five uppercuts, the drill is completed by throwing a right cross, left hook, right cross.

**Drill 64. Speed drill 4**

Speed drill four is all about knees. The pad holder is grabbed in a Thai plumm and the striker performs six alternating skip knees to the pads as fast as possible. The leg needs to switch back on every knee.

**Drill 65. Speed drill 5**

The last basic speed drill focuses on kicks. Two rebound round kicks are performed on the right side, followed by two rebound round kicks on the left side. One hand needs to be kept up guarding at all times when kicking. The other hand can be used to generate more power or assist balance.
Drill 66. Speed drills 1-5

To up the intensity of the speed drills and make it more challenging, the pad holder can call speed drill 1 to 5 and all five drills are performed sequentially as fast as possible. The drills are designed so that each one flows into the next fluidly, maximising speed. We use this drill a lot at my Academy and have certain times that this drill has to be performed within, which gives students targets to aim for:

*Time to complete speed drills 1-5 consecutively.*

**Average:** 20-30 seconds

**Good:** 15-20 seconds

**Excellent:** 10-15 seconds

Obviously speed is relative to the person. Everyone knows that smaller lighter people are faster than taller, bigger people (except for some very rare exceptions). The targets above are therefore used by students to compare improvements in their own speed over the weeks, months and years that they train. There is very little point in comparing two different people, especially if they have different body types, ages or abilities.

**Intermediate speed drills**

Intermediate speed drills involve more technical striking combinations that include mixing various techniques, angles and levels. They are much more taxing than the basic speed drills, both physically and mentally. Remembering the order of the techniques and performing them at speed is a real challenge to memory and co-ordination. The pad holder will also find these drills more difficult, because they have to move the pads quickly into the specified positions. Once again good technique and correct body mechanics need to be maintained throughout the drills or they are started again.

**Drill 67. Intermediate speed drill 1**

- Jab
- Cross
- Left uppercut
- Right uppercut
- Left hook
- Right cross
- Double jab

**Drill 68. Intermediate speed drill 2**

- Jab
- Cross
- Left hook
- Right uppercut
- Left hook
- Right cross
- Double jab
Drill 69. Intermediate speed drill 3

Intermediate speed drill 3 mixes drill 1 and 2 together. This is easier to do if the double jab at the end of speed drill 1 is removed to leave the following combination:

**Intermediate speed drill 1**
- Jab
- Cross
- Left uppercut
- Right uppercut
- Left hook
- Right cross

**Intermediate speed drill 2**
- Jab
- Cross
- Left hook
- Right uppercut
- Left hook
- Right cross
- Double jab

This is an intense high energy, high co-ordination drill that makes the fighter think fast and punch fast. It also makes the pad holder do the same as they have to get the pads moving quickly. The striker can only punch as fast as the pads are there to be hit. A slow pad holder produces a slow striker. If this happens the pad holder has to work on developing their ability to move the pads quickly by “shadow padding”, i.e. practising holding the pads for the combination in the air whilst the striker works on the drill on the punch-bag. Once both parties are at the same speed the drill can be continued on the pads. There is zero point in a fast striker working with a slow pad holder. Both striker and holder will get frustrated and not enjoy the workout.

“HOW TO ADD THIS”

*Call “Speed drill 1”, “Speed drill 2” or “Speed drill 3”*

**TOP TRAINING TIP**

‘REST DAYS’

Make sure you have at least one full rest day a week to prevent overtraining. I prefer two rest days personally but that’s because I’m getting old. Do not do any exercise on rest days.
INTERCEPTION DRILLS

Intercepting an opponent’s attack is one of the hardest skills to develop as it takes great spacial awareness and timing. Interception is about timing your strike to land at the precise moment when the opponent steps into range. Strike too early and the technique falls short, strike too late and the technique is jammed and only partially effective. Bruce Lee believed interception was the highest level of skill and so named his Martial Art “Jeet Kune Do”, which means The Way Of The Intercepting Fist. If it was good enough for Bruce, it’s good enough for me.

Drill 70. Basic interception drills

**Interception jab**

The pad holder holds up the pad whilst out of distance and steps into range, prompting the striker to execute the jab at the right time to contact the pad.

**Interception cross**

Exactly the same process as the jab drill but the intercepting technique is a cross.

**Intercepting front kick**

This technique is particularly effective against a charging opponent who keeps moving forward in a straight line to attack. As the pad holder moves into range, the knee is bought up and a front kick is used to push them back. This drill is very popular with Thai Boxers, who use a foot jab or “Teep” to keep their opponent at bay.

Drill 71. Advanced interception drills

**Simultaneous block and counter**

The previous drills work as the opponent steps forward in preparation to strike. But sometimes the opponent will strike at the same time as they step forward. In this case it is necessary to block and strike back at the same time.

**Cover hook and jab**

In this drill the pad holder initiates a left hook to the head and simultaneously holds up the right pad allowing the striker to cover the hook and jab at the same time.

**Cover hook and cross**

This is similar to the previous technique but the pad holder lands a right hook to the head whilst holding the left pad up enabling the striker to cover and cross at the same time.
**Cover hook and hook**

The pad holder throws a left hook to the head and places the other pad on the inside of the left bicep. This means the striker can block the pad and perform a left hook at the same time.

**Cover hook and uppercut**

Once again the left hook is blocked by the striker and a left uppercut landed at the same time. This technique can also be done on the other side, with the striker blocking a right hook and executing a right uppercut.

**Cover kick and jab**

The pad holder kicks to the body with a left round kick, whilst the striker simultaneously covers with their right arm, steps to their left and jabs.

**Cover kick and cross**

This time a right roundhouse kick is delivered by the pad holder who at the same time holds up the right pad. The striker tucks their left elbow tightly to their body and steps forward into the kick, minimising its power, and throws a cross at the same time.

**“HOW TO ADD THIS”**

*These drills are best practiced in isolation as both partner’s need to know what to expect or injuries may occur. Run through each interception technique for a 2 or 3 minute round.*

**TOP TRAINING TIP**

‘OVERTRAINING’

Signs of overtraining include soreness, tiredness, lack of motivation, irritability, clumsiness and mood swings. Take a few days rest and come back refreshed and recharged.
Drill 72. Non-telegraphic motion was popularised by Bruce Lee in his book the Tao of Jeet Kune Do. Essentially it means not giving away or telegraphing your intention when striking. Every technique done on the pads should be as direct and non-telegraphic as possible. There are many ways that a strike can be telegraphed and these are commonly referred to in poker and fighting as “tells.” The most common tells are withdrawing the hand, flapping the elbow or stopping and starting motion.

**Winding up the hand**

Beginners frequently perform this tell because they try to strike with full power with every technique. In order to generate extra power, beginners have a habit of drawing the hand back from the target before throwing it forward. This is inefficient as the strike should move from the guard position straight to the target to be as direct as possible. The problem with drawing back the hand is that it alerts the opponent to one’s intentions. High-level Martial Artists are constantly reading their opponent’s tells and will notice immediately if a person withdraws prior to striking, which allows them to either move out of distance or counter with a more direct attack. The shortest distance between two points is a straight line so strikes should be delivered directly from the guard to the target without any deviation. Whilst a direct strike may not have as much power as a strike that has been wound up, it is more likely to hit the target.

**Flapping the elbow**

This is another common tell that results from trying to put too much power into punching techniques. The elbow flaps away from the body at the initiation of the punch to increase power. The elbow flap tell is easy to recognise and gives your opponent plenty of time to evade or counter. The elbows should be kept close to the body at all times to protect the ribs and internal organs, which will also reduce elbow flap when punching. Keep the elbows pointing down to the floor before punching to minimise elbow flap.
Stopping or starting

Many fighters start or stop moving before throwing a technique. For example, a fighter who is bouncing lightly on their feet, but suddenly stops as soon as they want to strike, gives away their intention. The same applies to a fighter who is still and suddenly explodes into motion. Bill Wallace is a master of concealing motion and at a seminar he explained this theory of continual motion. He believes that a Kickboxer should continually be in motion before throwing a technique as it overcomes inertia and conceals the initiation of a technique. So in his style of Kickboxing he is constantly moving before striking and as his roundhouse kick has been measured at over 60 mph, he probably knows what he’s talking about. Keep the body in motion at all times, it helps overcome inertia, keeps the muscles taut and ready and encourages non telegraphic initiation. This doesn’t mean leaping around like an angry chimpanzee, but rather just keeping the body moving most of the time.

When holding pads for your partner try to monitor your opponent’s tells and if you are nice, point out that they are giving away their techniques. If you are not nice, you can mentally note your partner’s tells to use against them during sparring. Padwork is therefore not only useful to the person striking but can also really benefit the pad holder, if they are willing to learn from the situation.

Assuming you are a nice person who wants to help their partner improve, you can continually provide feedback on when and how they give away their techniques, and hopefully they will do the same for you. Striking on the pads should be as direct as possible with no wind-up, elbow flap or noticeable change of motion during initiation. This will make you faster as your movements are more economical and direct.
BRUCE LEE’S FIVE WAYS OF ATTACK

Drill 73. Bruce Lee was way ahead of his time in his conceptualisation of Martial Arts and fighting sports. Bruce was very intelligent and was capable of analysing complex fighting movements and patterns, developing simple solutions that work in nearly all situations. His five ways of attack are adapted from concepts developed in fencing. The five ways is a great method of understanding how and why certain attacks work. Bruce noted that regardless of technique, range or style, there are only five ways to attack your opponent:

1. **Single direct attack**

   Single direct attack is pretty self-explanatory, it refers to a simple, single attack that travels via a direct route. A jab from a regular guard would be an example of a single direct attack. Single direct attacks are hard to pull off in sparring or competition as opponent's often see them coming. For this reason single direct attacks require a good setup, non-telegraphic motion and lots of speed to be effective. If any of these requirements are absent then the single direct attack will fail. A good setup means that you are in range to strike and that a target is open for attack. Non-telegraphic motion, as discussed, is about not giving away your intention. Speed is also required to get the single direct attack to the target as quickly as possible. Any technique can be a single direct attack, whether it is a jab, elbow, or spin kick, it’s all about setup speed and directness.

2. **Attack by combination**

   Attack by combination is also fairly simple to understand. It is an attack with two or more moves combined. Combination attacks are usually more effective than single direct attacks, as they provide the opponent with more stimuli to deal with. This lengthens their reaction time and forces them to think more about defence and less about countering. A three to five-part combination can overwhelm the opponent’s defences, especially if the combination is at different heights. Combinations that mix high, middle and low will be more effective than a combination to one level only. In Kickboxing and Thai Boxing this is easily achieved by targeting the entire body; kicking the legs, kneeing the body and punching the head. In MMA, takedowns can also be added to the mix.

3. **Fake or feint to attack**

   Fake and feinting attacks force an opponent into making a error and over-committing or opening themselves up in response to a fake attack. Faking and feinting serves a number of functions.

   1. It can be used to ascertain the opponent’s reactions without leaving one vulnerable to a counter-attack.

   2. It makes the opponent hesitate whilst closing distance.

   3. It creates a space in which one can attack.

   4. It can also be used to set a pattern of movement in the opponent that can then be exploited.

   Fakes need to be convincing in order to work. The fake attack needs to look almost identical to a real attack, forcing the opponent to respond or get hit. If the fake is not believable then there is no need for the opponent to react. A fighter needs to sell the fake to make the opponent react.
The simplest fake is performed by partially extending the jab in order to make the opponent react, then changing its direction and striking to a different target. Classic jab fakes include faking the jab high and then jabbing low (Fake 1), or faking the jab high and then crossing low (Fake 2).

4. Attack by drawing

This means intentionally leaving an opening in one's defence to draw an attack, which is then countered. In Boxing it is common to see professional fighters drop one or both hands in order to bait their opponent into throwing a punch which is countered. Attack by drawing requires lots of confidence, excellent timing and distancing. If you are not confident of the response you will get, do not try to draw your opponent.

For this method to work the bait has to be taken with the anticipated technique. If a fighter expects a punch and get a kick, they usually get hit. For this reason attack by drawing is usually only performed by top-level fighters.

Dropping the hands to the chest in order to bait a punch to the head, which is then countered, is a simple example of attack by drawing.
5. Hand immobilisation attack

Hand immobilisation attack refers to removing barriers in order to strike. If an opponent’s hands are up guarding their head, one method to get past their guard is to actively pull their hands away from the head and strike in the created gap. As Bruce Lee was a Wing Chun student first, he frequently used hand immobilisation techniques from this Kung Fu art in his training.

Whilst hand immobilisation, or trapping as it is also known, is common in certain Kung Fu systems, it is used in all Martial Arts and combat sports. Boxers trap with their hands, shoulders and elbows whilst infighting. Kickboxers trap legs when they catch kicks and trapping is very common in MMA, especially on the ground where arms can be pinned and trapped by the legs leaving the opponent vulnerable to strikes or submissions.

The pull and punch is the easiest hand immobilisation attack to perform and involves the pad striker pulling the opponent’s arm away from their face to expose a target.

The five ways of attack are a good way of remembering the various options a striker has when attacking. You can use these five ways on the pads individually or altogether. A person who is new to padwork will benefit from spending some time practising each way of attack on the pads before trying them in the mix. Spending 10 or 20 rounds drilling each over the course of a month will quickly integrate the five ways into padwork.

“How to Add This”

Once basic techniques have been learnt for each way of attack the pad holder can call

“Single attack”
Or
“Combo attack”
Or
“Fake”
Or
“Draw / Bait”
Or
“Trap”

And off you go.
Trapping is an integral part of advanced padwork as it is useful to know how to remove barriers or blocks presented by an opponent. The traditional trapping techniques taught in Wing Chun are very applicable when slightly modified for modern combat sports. Traditional Wing Chun has a unique stance that is not commonly used in Kickboxing or MMA. Most coaches consider a modified Boxing guard to be the most effective defensive stance and we have therefore adapted the Wing Chun trapping to fit this stance and guard.

The three main trapping techniques that work in Boxing, Kickboxing and MMA are pulling, pushing and pinning. Pulling refers to grabbing the opponent's arm and pulling it out of the way to expose a target. Pushing involves moving an arm and pinning it to the body to prevent a blocking motion and pinning is a method of temporarily restricting the movement of both arms.

Trapping tends to work best when it is set up. Just trying to grab an opponent's arms and pull them to the side will usually result in a punch in the face. Firstly it is easier to trap, pin or redirect an arm when your opponent is stationary, stuck in a corner or flat on their back as this reduces their mobility and escape options. Trying to trap an arm when an opponent is free to move or aware of what you're doing will not work. Secondly a trap has to be unexpected. If it is used too frequently, it will lose the element of surprise.

Pulling and pushing traps are most effective against an open guard when the opponent's arms are not close to their head. Pinning traps work best against a tight boxing guard with the partner's hands touching their face with their elbows down.

**Drill 74. Pulling traps**

From a matched stance the lead arm is used to pull the pad holder's front arm down, exposing the target. This is easy to do with MMA gloves on and possible with Boxing gloves with a little training. The secret is to hook your hand on the outside of your partner's wrist and use a quick jerking motion to move the hand down.

If the pad is held at punching distance, then a right cross is a good follow-up (Pull Trap 1).

If the pad is closer, then a right elbow is appropriate (Pull Trap 2).

Another good pulling trap is to pull the lead arm up and away from the body exposing the ribs and follow with a sidekick (Pull Trap 3).

When performing pulling traps it helps to angle away from the partner's free hand as they may be tempted to punch you with it. A slight step to the right will help neutralise any counters during the trap.

Let's discuss the pull traps in a little more detail.
Pull trap 1

This trap involves using the lead hand to pull down on the opponent's lead hand in order to deliver a right cross over the top. The punch is initiated as soon as the hand is cleared from the target, as any delay in punching may allow the pad holder time to counter.

Pull trap 2

Pull trap 2 is performed in the same way as pull trap 1 but rather than a right cross being used, a right elbow is delivered instead. Pull trap 2 works well if the opponent's head is pulled forward into range.

Pull trap 3

Once again the left-hand or lead hand is used to pull the opponent's arm away but in this case the opponent covers their head with their other hand, so there is no target available. A lead leg sidekick is therefore used to strike the knee or ribs. This dramatically increases the force of the sidekick as the opponent is being pulled forward into the kick.

Pull traps 1 and 2 are followed up with a hook, cross, hook.
Pull trap 3 is followed up with a cross, hook, cross.

Drill 75. Pushing traps

Pushing traps are used to force the arm into the body allowing strikes to the head. The right palm is used to aggressively slap the pad holder's lead arm down opening the guard. Keep your chin tucked into the shoulder of the punching arm in case of counter-attacks.

Push trap 1

Push trap one uses the right-hand to force the opponent's arm down away from their head, whilst delivering a left jab. Tucking the chin when performing this technique is an important as a right-hand counter is possible. The arm should be pinned in the mid forearm area and pressured tight to the body to reduce the chance of it escaping.

Push trap 2

This push trap also uses the right-hand to pin the opponent's lead arm, but a left upward elbow is the preferred follow-up in this instance. This is either because the opponent has moved forward or the person performing the trap has over-committed. A jab in this instance would be jammed, so in its place a left upward elbow is used. The upward direction serves to drive the tip of the elbow to the chin and also provide a simultaneous cover against any punches.
Push trap 3

This trap is similar to push trap 1 in that it uses a jab, but at the same time as the jab is used, a right stomp to the knee is simultaneously applied. While this reduces the power of both strikes, it is designed to overwhelm the opponent's defences as they will either block the punch or the kick, but will rarely block both.

Push traps 1, 2 and 3 can be followed up with cross, hook, cross.

Drill 76. Pinning traps

Pinning traps use the length of the forearm to momentarily pin both the pad holder's arms to their head. This type of trap works best when the opponent's arms are in a tight defensive guard with both hands up and close to the head. The forearm is then driven across the arms like a horizontal bar, momentarily stopping the opponent from punching.

Pin trap 1

This trap is set up by throwing a jab high to draw the hands up. The jabbing arm is then bent and used to bar across both of the opponent's arms. While this arm is pinning the other hand can deliver an uppercut to the head between the elbows or a hook to the exposed body.

Pin trap 2

This initiated is exactly the same way as pin trap 1. A high jab is thrown to draw the hands up and the arm folded to pin with the forearm horizontal. While the opponent's arms are pinned a straight knee is driven into to the body.

Pin trap 3

Set up the same way as the other pinning traps, but as soon as the arms are controlled, the striker steps across the body with the left foot, and lands a spin back right elbow. Sweet!

“How to add this”

To add trapping to pad training, the pad holder calls either:

“Pull 1, Pull 2, Pull 3”
or
“Push 1, Push 2, Push 3”
or
“Pin 1, Pin 2, Pin 3”
Faking, as described in the five ways of attack section, is using an arm or a leg to set the opponent up. By pretending to strike with one technique and then following up with another, the opponent is temporarily caught out, reacting to the wrong stimulus. Learning how to fake is an integral part of all combat sports. Faking allows you to get one step ahead and opens up opportunities to strike cleanly. Faking is based on deception, pretending to do one thing whilst doing another. Every Martial Art has its favourite faking techniques. Boxers frequently fake with the jab, to then throw the hook or cross; Kickboxers fake with their feet when kicking; and MMA fighters fake takedowns to land strikes and fake strikes to get takedowns. If you are not currently faking when using the pads, you are missing out on an excellent way to setup an opponent. At the very least you need to be aware of common fakes so they don’t get used on you.

We have 4 basic fakes we use for Boxing in the Mitt Master system, 3 basic fakes for the Kickboxing system and 3 basic fakes for the MMA system. This totals 10 basic fakes, which you can mix to create hundreds of faking combinations. What is important when faking is to sell the fake. If you try to fake with unconvincing body language or mechanics only a complete idiot will fall for it. Fakes need to be convincing to be effective so you have to work on selling the fake like an actor tries to sell a character. Selling fake relies on using realistic triggers that your partner will react to. A fake punch to the body needs to be combined with the movements that would normally accompany the technique, such as bending low to strike, looking at the body with the eyes and bringing the hands down to strike. If these movements look real, then the opponent will react to the fake body punch and will try to protect, consequently exposing another target. Faking requires lots and lots of practice both on the bag and on the pads to be used in sparring. Start with single simple fakes, and once these have been mastered, try faking in combination.

**Drill 77. Boxing fakes**

Faking is an integral part of Boxing, all the top fighters fake to set the opponent up. The four most basic fakes are as follows.

**Fake 1 - Fake jab low to jab high**

Similar to the last fake but this time the jab is thrown low and changed to a high jab halfway through. Make sure you dip your body and keep looking low during the fake.

or

**Fake 1 - Fake jab high to jab low**

A fake jab is thrown high with the body moving up and the eyes looking at the forehead. Halfway through the arms extension the knees bend, the body dips and the jab is landed to the body.
Fake 2 - Fake jab to cross

A fake jab is aimed high to distract the opponent and then a cross is targeted to the body.

Fake 3 - Fake jab to hook

A fake jab is aimed straight to the face in order to draw a parry from the opponent. As the opponent attempts to parry the jab, the punch changes direction and loops around the parry, landing a left hook to the head. This is one of the best faking combinations in the world and taught at every gym, but it is still effective and still catches people. To see this technique executed perfectly check out Dan Hardys fake jab to left hook knockout of Duane Ludwig in UFC 146.

Fake 4 - Fake jab to body, overhand right

A fake jab is aimed to the body to draw the opponent’s hands and elbows down to protect. The fighter then steps to their left, dips the body and lands a H bomb overhand right.

Drill 78. Kickboxing fakes

All the previous Boxing fakes apply in Kickboxing, but Kickboxers also have the ability to use their legs to fake with:

Fake 5 - Fake round kick to front kick

The knee is raised to the side and the foot kicked out as if beginning a roundhouse kick. Halfway through the motion, the round kick changes into a front kick. Bas Rutten was very good at this fake.
Fake 6 - Fake front kick to round kick

The lead knee is raised vertically as if executing a front kick. As the leg is extended, the hips rotate and a round kick is delivered with the same leg.

Submarine kick

The submarine kick is used to kick under a rising shin block. A fake round kick to the leg is thrown and as the opponent lifts their shin to block, the kick is redirected under their block, to kick the support leg. It's called a submarine kick because it goes under the blocking leg.

Fake round kick low to round kick high (not shown)

This is a common fake in Karate. A lead leg round kick is thrown to the inside of the thigh, and as it retracts, a flick round kick is thrown to the head with the same foot. The first kick can land or be a fake to draw attention low. For this fake to work it needs to be done quickly and requires good flexibility and balance. Do not put your foot down between the two kicks!

Drill 79. MMA fakes

MMA fighters can use all the fakes from Kickboxing and Boxing listed above, but as they also use takedowns and tackles, they can create more faking combinations.

Jab, fake overhand right, body tackle

A jab is aimed high, followed by a fake overhand right, which is used to cover distance. As the opponent blocks, the overhand the right arm wraps around the waist to gain a body tackle, followed by a trip takedown.
Fake hook to snatch single leg

A fake lead hook is thrown high whilst closing distance. As the opponent blocks the hook, the rear arm is used to pick up the lead leg, thus setting up a single leg takedown.

Fake takedown to punch

Faking a change of level may encourage the opponent to drop their hands to defend the anticipated takedown, but a punch is thrown to the face instead.

Drill 80. Feints

Feints are body and eye movements that are designed to create a reaction in the opponent. They are similar to fakes, but you do not extend an arm or a leg. Instead, you use small body movements with the feet, knees, shoulders, hips and eyes to trick the opponent. Feints are harder to learn than fakes, because the movements are more subtle and refined. Feints can be just as effective as fakes and leave you less open to a counter-attack if they go wrong.

Feints also allow you to disrupt your opponent’s timing and mess with their head. This helps break up their attacking combinations and makes them hesitate. A fighter who is good at feinting is able to control the reactions of their opponent. The simplest feint is to use the eyes. Look low and strike high or look high and strike low. Speak to your coach about other feints.
THE SIX TYPES OF OPPONENT & ZONING

There are basically six ways of fighting, and most fighters will fall into one or sometimes two of these styles. Padwork can be designed to mimic these styles in order to train functional strategies for dealing with different types of fighters. The more padwork or sparring a fighter does, the more they realise that just doing the same thing will not work against all opponent’s.

Drill 81. Different opponents need different techniques and tactics.

Opponent one: The charger

The charger is an aggressive fighter who tends to move forward in a straight line in an attempt to overwhelm with firepower and aggression. They frequently throw fast combinations and are looking to do as much damage as quickly as possible. In MMA, the infamous Wanderlai Silva is a typical charger. He starts fights aggressively and tries to destroy his opponent in as brutal a fashion as possible. This is why Wanderlai has earned the nickname “The Axe Murderer”. A pad holder who is replicating this style needs to attack with short aggressive blitzes, charging forward quickly in a straight line.

How to deal with the charger

The charger is a dangerous opponent, because they are constantly hunting for the knockout. It is necessary to halt their charge with an intercepting attack, such as a strong front kick or knee. Alternatively you can try to step to the side and counter as they charge past. In MMA it is also possible to duck under their wild attack and take them down, as they tend to over-commit.

Opponent 2: The runner

The runner is the opposite of a charger. This person looks to use a lot of footwork and catch their opponent out of position. They rarely charge forward, but look to pot shot from long range and avoid getting hit. The pad holder who is copying this style needs to move a lot, maintain distance and counter when the striker lunges into range. Carlos Condit used this running strategy to great effect in his first fight with Nick Diaz; staying away from Nick’s dangerous boxing and countering with kicks, before angling off and escaping.

How to deal with a runner

It is necessary to corner a runner to stop them moving and escaping. Good ring craft and footwork is required in order to back the runner into a corner and then strike when they cannot escape. Moving in a zig-zag fashion is more effective than moving straightforward, as zig-zagging will help cut them off. In MMA, getting a takedown and putting them on their back takes away their fancy footwork.

Opponent 3: The elusive runner

The elusive runner shares a similar strategy to the runner, but incorporates more evasive footwork, moving laterally, diagonally, pivoting and faking with the feet. The best MMA fighter to use this style is UFC Champion Dominic Cruz. His amazing footwork gives his opponent’s nightmares as they cannot anticipate
how he will move or where he will be; as a result, they spend a lot of time fruitlessly chasing him around the octagon. Check him out, he is amazing.

**How to deal with the elusive runner**

This is a very tricky opponent to deal with as they usually have superior footwork and timing. Sometimes a charging blitz is enough to freeze them in their tracks, creating a clinch which will neutralise their footwork. In MMA, the best place to keep an elusive runner is flat on their back, where they are unable to use their sexy footwork skills. The pad holder can use lots of angled footwork when holding the pads to imitate this style.

**Opponent 4: The counter fighter**

The counter fighter tends to hold their ground and combine good head movement with a tight defence to avoid strikes, and then quickly counter in the gaps. Floyd Mayweather is a master counter fighter, he uses tight defence and great head movement to draw fighters onto his punches. The pad holder can mimic a counter fighter by striking back at the same time as the striker initiates, forcing them to stay covered on the way in.

**How to deal with the counter fighter**

Counter fighters prefer to wait for an opponent to attack in order to quickly counter. Directly attacking a counter fighter is very risky. It is necessary to use fakes, feints and broken rhythm to get them to over-commit and counter their counter. Tricky.

**Opponent 5: The blocker**

The blocker holds their ground blocking strikes and looking for their time to strike back. Quinton 'Rampage' Jackson is a fighter who is very good at blocking and then knocking opponent's out. His knockout of Wanderlai Silva in UFC 92 was an excellent example of blocking, rolling and then countering back with a dynamite left hook. A pad holder looking to mimic a blocker needs to be fairly stationary, and add head movement and counters while they hold the pads.

**How to deal with a blocker**

Blockers tend not to have the best footwork, as they prefer to stand their ground and cover, so it is a good idea to use lots of footwork and angles to set them up. It is vital not to remain in front of a blocker after completing a combination, as they are waiting for you to stop in order to explode. As soon as a combination is completed, an off-balance or exit away from their power side is required.

**Opponent 6. The Chameleon**

The Chameleon is the most dangerous type of opponent. The Chameleon is an opponent who can adopt any of these styles as and when they need. They may have a favourite style, but they are capable of changing at a moment's notice in order to win the fight. Most fighters have a preferred style and are reluctant to change as it makes them feel uncomfortable. Chameleons are willing to change their style in order to win the fight. Anderson Silva is a Chameleon. He has the ability to use all the different styles as and when
they are needed. Sometimes he charges, sometimes he runs, sometimes he blocks and a lot of the time he counters. This is why he is considered the number one MMA fighter in the world, because his opponents are never sure of what they are going to get and he usually finds a way to win. Sometimes he attacks aggressively, other times he lays back and counters, and occasionally he runs and potshots from a distance. Every time he steps into the cage he brings something new and unexpected. A pad holder that wants to use this style must be capable of creative adaptation, mixing styles and techniques in order to confuse and overwhelm the striker. Unpredictability is key.

**How to deal with a chameleon**

Only a Chameleon can beat a Chameleon. Fighters with one rigid style cannot hope to be effective as a chameleon will adapt and assume a style that will neutralise their opponent's strengths. It will require an opponent who is also capable of spontaneous in-fight adaptation to beat a chameleon.

**Drill 82. Zoning**

The concept of zoning is taken from Filipino Martial Arts, where defending against weapons is a fundamental skill. If a stick is being swung towards your head, there are certain places it is safer to stand than others. Standing directly in front of the stick will result in a headache and concussion. Stepping inside or outside the arc of the swing will limit its impact and is known as zoning. All Martial Arts use zoning to avoid power. In Kickboxing, the fighter steps inside the roundhouse kick and counters. In Boxing, the fighter avoids stepping to their left and into their opponent's powerful right hand; and in MMA, circling the hips away from a tackling opponent will help prevent the takedown. If a fighter is facing an opponent with a known strength, such as a strong left hook, padwork should include plenty of zoning away from this favourite power technique. Top UK fighter Michael Bisping made the mistake of zoning into Dan Henderson's devastating right-hand in UFC 100 and paid the price by taking a little nap.

As 90% of fighters are right-handed, it is always advisable to zone away from the right-hand side of their body. The right cross, right elbow, right knee and right round kick are the power weapons for most fighters. Staying slightly to the opponent's left (your right) keeps a fighter safely away from these power shots.

**TOP TRAINING TIP**

**‘RECOVERY’**

Improvements in fitness only occur when you are resting. Hard training acts as a chemical stimulus to create physical changes. These changes occur during your sleep. Make sure you get enough sleep (7-8hrs) or you are wasting your training time.
LONGER PAD COMBINATIONS

Shorter combinations of 2-5 moves are suitable for most situations because short blitzes tend to happen frequently during sparring and fighting. It is rare that combinations involve more than five techniques, unless the opponent is rocked and ready to be knocked out. Generally an opponent will move or strike back during your combination. This means a new combination needs to be set up and initiated. Occasionally it is worthwhile practising longer drills as they help develop aerobic fitness, muscular endurance, and challenge memory and integration skills.

Aerobic fitness

The longer the drill, the more effective it will be in developing cardio vascular/aerobic fitness. This type of fitness is commonly improved as a result of keeping the heart rate at 60-75% of maximum for a minimum of 30 minutes. Longer drills help keep the heart rate elevated and minimise downtime when the student is not working. Regular long padwork performed at in this zone will help develop aerobic fitness. Using a wireless heart rate monitor when training will help identify the correct training intensity for you.

Muscular endurance

The repetitive nature of long drills stresses the muscles, because they have to perform techniques repeatedly with little rest. Training longer combos will develop the muscles ability to keep going when working at near maximum intensity. The build up of lactic acid (which is experienced as a burning feeling in the muscles) happens when performing longer combinations. Over time the body adapts and can buffer more lactic acid in the muscles, meaning the fighter can continue at high-intensity for longer. Good muscular endurance is vital in Martial Arts, especially when fighting, as poor muscular endurance makes the hands drop, the punches weaken and the kicks slow.

Memory

The longer the combination, the harder it is to remember. It is obviously easier to remember a 5 part combination than a 20 part combination, but it is useful to develop the ability to remember longer patterns.

Integration of skill

Longer drills integrate a lot of different skills. You can include punching, kicking, evasion, blocking and clinching techniques in a single drill. This helps the fighter blend different techniques in a similar manner to how they will use them in sparring. Pay attention now, the next sentence is important. How effective a person is at the transitions between the different techniques determines how skilled a Martial Artist they will become. Beginners have jerky transitions, because they lurch from one technique to the next. In comparison, experienced fighter can be summed up in one word... Smooth. It is truly awe inspiring to watch a pro work the pads; they are powerful and explosive, yet flow like water. Good integration is what turns a good fighter into a great fighter.

Biomechanics

In order to perform long drills with maximum speed and power, good body mechanics are required. Poor mechanics will weaken each technique and reduce efficiency. This will be obvious to the pad holder who will see and feel every punch and kick and can note any sub-standard technique. It is harder to maintain good body mechanics in long combinations, so is therefore more challenging. Longer drills help develop good body mechanics by forcing the striker to rotate, drive and shift their weight into every technique.
The round kick series is adapted from the drills taught in the United States Muay Thai Association, headed by Arjarn Chai Suirisute. Master Chai, as he is also known, is one of the first Muay Thai instructors to introduce the art to America in the 70’s. He was also one of the first coaches to structure and formalise the techniques used in Muay Thai and developed many different Thai pad drills. I trained with him at seminars a few times and really enjoyed his intense technical style and long pad combinations. So the round kick series is my interpretation of Masters Chai’s round kick drills.

The round kick series is an interactive drill, with the pad holder feeding techniques back. The emphasis of the drill is training different round kicks and how to defend against the round kick.

**Drill 83. Round Kick Series**

*(Orthodox stance)*

*(L = Left)*

*(R = Right)*

1. Jab - Cross
2. **Pad Holder R round kicks, you lean/step back**
3. R cross
4. L hook
5. R round kick
6. **Pad Holder R round kicks, you catch A (wrap over kick with left arm)**
7. R cross
8. L cut kick (sweep kick targeted at the back of the support leg)
9. R cross
10. L Hook
11. R round kick
12. R round kick
13. **Pad Holder R round kicks, you long stop kick (a front kick to thigh or belly to disrupt the pad holder’s round kick)**
14. L round kick
15. R cross
16. L hook
17. R jump round kick
18. **Pad Holder round kicks, you shin block**
19. R step / jump knee
20. Grab 6 skip knees
21. Spin back elbow
22. Double left round kick
23. Double right round kick
**FRONT KICK SERIES**

As the title suggests, the front kick series is focused on the front kick. It includes different types of front kicks and various defences against a front kick. Once again the pad holder active, returning front kicks at specific times during the drill.

**Drill 84. Front Kick Series**

(Orthodox stance)

1. Jab - Cross  
2. **Pad Holder L front kicks, you left scoop**  
3. R round kick to thigh  
4. L round kick  
5. R cross  
6. L hook  
7. R round kick  
8. **Pad Holder L front kicks, you catch with both hands**  
9. Pull leg to the left & L hook  
10. Cross  
11. L Switch Knee  
12. R round kick  
13. R round kick  
14. **Pad Holder L front kicks, you right scoop**  
15. R cut kick  
16. L hook  
17. R cross  
18. L switch round kick  
19. Front kick / Jump front kick  
20. Jump Cross / Superman punch

Most of this drill is fairly self explanatory. The scoops, however, could be confusing. Scooping with the left hand means dropping the left hand down from the guard position in a semi circular clockwise direction, redirecting the pad holder’s front kick away from the body. Scooping with the right hand means using the right hand to deflect the front kick away in an anti clockwise direction.

**TOP TRAINING TIP**

‘SPARRING’

Unless you are training for a fight, keep sparring light and controlled. This avoids injuries, develops technical skill and keeps things friendly. Sparring should be fun!
**ESCAPING THE CORNER**

Being pinned in the corner, or stuck against the cage is not a nice place to be. It limits the escapes possible, restricts footwork and allows the opponent to control the fight. A fighter should never be in the corner unless they want to be in the corner. Good footwork should keep fighter away from the corners or cage wall, but occasionally mistakes happen and a fighter ends up unintentinally stuck in a corner.

**Drill 85.** There are four basic techniques that are useful in escaping from a corner.

1. **Footwork**
   While defending punches, the fighter can use footwork to escape the corner. Rolling underneath a hook and pivoting out is a good technique; as is parrying a straight punch and stepping to the side in order to escape.

2. **Hip pull**
   By slipping a jab and closing quickly, the fighter is able to wrap their lead arm around the opponent's waist or hip, step forward, and pull them into the corner. Keep the other hand up and tuck the chin at all times.

3. **Thai clinch**
   Parrying down the arms of the opponent and grabbing their neck with both hands gives you enough leverage to deliver knees to the body and twist the opponent into the corner.

4. **Double under hooks**
   Forcing both hands under the partner's arms allows a fighter to clasp their hands together, palm to palm, and lift or twist their opponent into the corner.
Training these corner escapes is highly recommended. If you are going to step into a ring you should know how to use the ring to your advantage. I had a friend who was a very competent Kickboxer, but he got stuck in the corner during a round and couldn’t escape, which cost him the fight.

“How To Add This”

The pad holder should gently strike at the person in the corner until they escape. First of all train footwork escapes and add the other methods as skill improves. Over time, the pad holder can strike harder and with more intensity, until the striker is comfortable escaping the corner under full attack.
FisH Hooking

Fish hooking is a technique used in Bando Boxing and Muay Thai. It involves grabbing around the partner’s neck with one arm and using this “hook” to pull the partner into knees. It is easily executed after an elbow as the hand just extends and hooks onto the partner’s neck. Once the fish hook is in place, it is safer to pivot to the side and pull down on the head before delivering knees. This helps control the partner, while off-balancing them and keeps you away from danger. The fish hook can be applied with either arm.

Drill 86. The right fishhook drill is usually the easiest to apply as it feels more natural.

- First a right cross is performed
- Then a right elbow
- The right arm extended and used to grip the pad holder’s neck
- Followed by a right knee and a right round kick.

The left fishhook drill is exactly the same just performed with the left arm.

- A left jab is initiated
- Next a left elbow
- The left hand is extended to grip the pad holder’s neck and left switch knee landed
- Finally the pad holder is pushed away to allow for left switch round kick.

The full fishhook drill mixes the left fishhook drill immediately followed by the right fishhook drill.

TOP TRAINING TIP

‘ILLNESS’

Don’t train if you are ill. Most people claim they want to ‘sweat it out’ but more often than not it just makes it worse and spreads it amongst your training partners. Stay at home.
The Superman punch has been around in Kickboxing for many years but has recently come back in vogue with MMA stars, such as Georges St-Pierre, using it frequently. His switch left Superman punch is a fantastic technique that still catches opponent's off guard, even though they know he is going to use it.

**Drill 87.** The standard right Superman punch can be used in three ways: 1. Either as a follow up to a fake knee or kick; 2. To cover distance, or 3. To punch up at a taller opponent. Unfortunately, the Superman has become so common that people are getting very good at defending it, so we have developed some variations that will keep your opponent guessing.

### Superman punch to the body

This is just like a regular Superman punch, but instead of punching high, we punch low to the chest or solar plexus. It is set up like a regular Superman and the person performing the technique makes sure to look up like they are aiming for the head. As the opponent leans back or covers to block the punch is delivered to the open body.

### Superman hook

As everyone expects a straight Superman punch, sometimes the Superman hook takes people by surprise. The mechanics are the same as a Superman cross, but instead of throwing the punch straight down the line, it is hooked around the opponent’s guard.

### Superman uppercut cross

An opponent anticipating a Superman punch may crouch down to avoid it. Throwing a lead uppercut a fraction before lifts the opponent’s head, ready to receive the flying cross. The uppercut is delivered as the right knee is lifted and then the jump punch is performed.
GSP’s lead Superman punch

Georges St-Pierre has made this technique very effective. Rather than using the Superman with the right hand, he throws it of the left hand by kicking his lead leg back and extending his body forward as he lands this punch.

Drill 88. Superman counters

The Superman is a dynamic and powerful punch, therefore, blocking it is the least sensible option, as this means absorbing a lot of impact. There are several more functional counters to the Superman. In the following pictures the pad holder is performing the Superman punch.

1. **Move out of the way**
   If the Superman punch is attempted from too far away, it is easy to step out of its way and counter as the opponent flies by.

2. **Stop cross**
   Slipping the head to the left to avoid the Superman and throwing a cross at the same time is a very simple and effective counter to the Superman punch.

3. **Stop kick**
   If one sees the punch coming, a front kick can be used to knock the opponent out of the sky.

4. **Knee**
   Slipping the Superman to the left and throwing a powerful right knee will severely hurt the opponent as their body impales itself upon your kneecap.

5. **For MMA : Double leg**
   If the opponent over-commits their bodyweight on the Superman punch, it is possible to duck, catch them mid-air and dump them on their back.

All of these counters require skill and timing which is why most fighters try to block the Superman, but with a little practice all these techniques work well against a full speed attack.
FOOTSWEEPS

Footsweeps are an integral part of many combat sports, including Kickboxing, Muay Thai and MMA. Footsweeps are a very practical tool, they cost little energy and have a massive effect if performed correctly. Even done incorrectly, they still have the ability to destabilise. A successful footsweep leaves the opponent either laying on their back wondering how they got there or off-balance in a vulnerable position.

Drill 89. As different Martial Arts have different footsweeps, I have included one from Kali, one from Muay Thai and one from Judo. Each is effective but, of course, will need drilling to master the finer details.

Sweep 1. Kali footsweep

Anton St James first taught me this footsweep. It involves using the inside of the foot to drag the opponent off-balance. The left arm is hooked behind the pad holder's neck, as the instep of the lead foot is placed next to the pads holder's instep. By stepping to your right and pulling the pad holder slightly behind you, the opponent's weight is shifted to the rear leg. This leaves their lead leg light, which can then be swept to the right.

This is a very low risk sweep, if it doesn’t work then quick follow ups with either arm can be performed. If it does work it will leave the opponent laying flat out on the ground. Pulling the pad holder slightly behind you makes all the difference here.
Sweep 2. **Judo foot sweep**

Judo has a selection of excellent foot sweeps. The one we are looking at now is really classified as a reap. In Japanese it is called Osoto Gari, “or major outer reap”. It is a throw/sweep that involves kicking out the opponent’s lead leg. This is a technique that is instinctively used by people all over the world. If you watch kids play fighting, they will perform this technique automatically with no training. As it is such a natural move, it is easy to learn and very powerful when performed explosively. As with all foot sweeps, it is necessary to break the opponent's balance before attempting this technique. A balanced opponent will be difficult, if not impossible, to sweep.

The Osoto Gari requires the opponent’s bodyweight to be pushed backwards over their heels. The easiest way to practice this sweep is to grab your partner around the neck with the left arm, while the right controls their opposite bicep. The sweep is performed by simultaneously pushing the opponent’s weight over the heels, stepping to the right and using the back of the left leg to sweep out the opponent’s leg. If this sweep is performed aggressively, the opponent will accelerate towards the ground; he or she, therefore, needs to know how to break their fall safely in order to avoid injury. In Judo, the first technique you learn is how to fall without getting damaged. These falling techniques are called “ukemi” or break falls. The body’s natural reaction when falling is to reach towards the ground with the arms. This is dangerous as an extended arm can lock out and break. Break falls work by tucking the body in rather than reaching out, and by landing on the side of the body whilst exhaling. If there is air in the lungs when the person hits the ground, they may get winded, so a sharp exhalation is encouraged upon impact with the ground. Breakfalls, like everything else in Martial Arts, require a lot of consistent practice to perfect.
Sweep 3. **Muay Thai foot sweep**

Muay Thai involves a lot of clinching and throwing. In fact clinching, kneeing and throwing are highly scored during a Muay Thai Fight. This sweep is actually more of a tripping motion, using the heel to the back of the opponent’s leg. It starts by controlling the opponent’s head in the Thai clinch (plumm). Both forearms are then simultaneously shoved into the opponent’s chest, knocking their weight backwards. At the same time, the heel is hooked behind the knee to stop them stepping back, tripping them over with the hooking leg.

This technique won’t work if the push with the arms and the trip are performed separately; they need to be executed at the same time.

---

**“HOW TO ADD THIS”**

The pad holder can call “Sweep 1,2, or 3” and the fighter can set up and execute either the Kali footsweep, the Judo footsweep or the Thai trip.
CLINCH ESCAPE DRILLS

All combat sports include clinching techniques when the competitors get close and start to try to control each other’s arms, head or hips. Boxing, Kickboxing and MMA all have intricate clinching techniques, designed to reduce the effectiveness of the opponent’s strikes, while setting up one’s own techniques. Being in a clinch with a more experienced opponent is often referred to as “swimming through quicksand”. Like sinking in quicksand, clinching saps your energy and every mistake seems to make things worse as you sink deeper and deeper. Learning how to escape from the clinch is, therefore, a mandatory skill for all fighters regardless of style.

Drill 90. Initially, we use the following three drills to familiarise our students with escaping the clinch.

Thai clinch escape

Being stuck in the Thai clinch really sucks. The opponent has tight control of your head and, therefore, your body as well. They can deliver knees to the legs, body or head and can throw at any time. One only needs to look at Rich Franklin’s nose after he had experienced Anderson Silva’s clinch in UFC 64 to see how destructive the Thai clinch can be. Learning how to get out of this position is a must. There are many techniques for escaping the Thai clinch: pummelling the hands back inside, driving the shoulder across and wedging the neck. While all of these techniques can be effective, the simplest way I have discovered of breaking the Thai clinch, is the double chin push. The pad holder holds the striker in the Thai clinch. Before they can start delivering hard knees, the striker places the palms of both hands on the pad holder’s chin, strengthens their arms and pushes the head back and away. This will break the pad holder’s grip on the head, giving the striker a chance to escape. Obviously there’s a lot of pressure being exerted on the pad holder’s neck, so care is required when training this technique with team mates. But when using this technique during competition, a fighter needs to push as hard and as violently as possible on the chin to ensure the grip is broken. Gentle pressure won’t work, an explosive shove is required to guarantee the clinch will be broken.

Body wrap clinch escape

Sometimes when an opponent is tired and wanting to rest, they may wrap their arms around the upper body, essentially performing a bear hug. This ties up your arms preventing punches and allows them to take a quick breather. In this instance it is necessary for the striker to shove the pad holder back violently and
quickly with both forearms, filling the gap created with a short punching blitz, such as 10 straight punches. Repeating this over and over is a great conditioning drill, as the striker has to explode, push away and then quickly strike before repeating. This is very tiring and can really push the lactic endurance in the upper body.

**Arm wrap clinch escape**

A more skilled fighter will wrap their arms above the elbow when clinching, to reduce the chances of an arm escaping. To replicate this situation the pad holder wraps one or both of the striker’s arms, making it difficult to them to escape. To escape, the striker quickly draws back their shoulder and then strikes forward with it, creating a bit of space to allow them to rip their arm out.
SELF DEFENCE DRILLS

I have included one Self Defence orientated padwork drill to illustrate how the pads can also be used to train more traditional Martial Arts / Self Defence skills. Although these techniques may be considered “Self Defence”, I have personally applied them during Kickboxing sparring, so I know they can be integrated with combat sports training as well. At our Academy we use this, and other Self Defence drills, to add a bit of variety to classes and to practice control and restraint techniques. We think all Martial Artists should have basic skills in control and restraint, as it complements the striking arts and allows a fighter to control a resisting opponent without causing serious damage. For example, using an arm lock to control a drunk and unruly family member is preferable to repeatedly elbowing them in the face in order to restrain them. In some situations control techniques are preferable to knocking someone out.

Drill 91. Control & Restraint Drill

• 1. The pad holder elbows towards the striker’s head.
• 2. The striker raises both hands to block the elbow and their right hand grips the wrist.
• 3. It is important to circle the right leg backward whilst applying pressure to the elbow with the left forearm, as this takes the striker away from any counters and adds momentum to the armlock.
• 4. It is then possible to drag the pad holder down to the ground by pressing down with the left forearm whilst simultaneously pulling up on their right wrist.
• 5. If a more aggressive defence is needed the striker can follow up with a right knee to the body.
• 6. As the opponent’s head lifts from the knee, the left hand traps down and right elbow is delivered to the face.
• 7. This is quickly followed by a backward trip with the left leg if needed

Care should be taken when performing the armlock as it puts a lot of pressure on the elbow joint. A quick uncontrolled movement can easily dislocate the elbow and make you very unpopular with your training partner. Control is needed when doing joint manipulation techniques. When learning this sequence it is worth practising each step 10 to 15 times before attempting the entire combination.

“HOW TO ADD THIS”

The pad holder can call this drill anytime by saying “Self Defence drill” and follow with a right elbow.
There are many Self Defence drills that can be added to padwork. Some will focus on armlocks, others deal with choke defence, and many train counters to common street attacks such as headlocks. We tend to use these Self Defence drills for students who have expressed an interest in learning such techniques; or those who are older and not interested in competing, but still want to learn new skills. It has been estimated that 90% of Martial Arts students never compete in the ring or cage, so they need other challenges to keep them interested and motivated. Self Defence material is easily integrated into padwork, and adds a fresh dimension to training.
CONSIDERATIONS FOR MMA PAD HOLDING

All of the drills in this book can be used for MMA, but there are some additional specific concepts that need to be considered when doing MMA padwork. First of all there's the reality that MMA includes takedowns and striking on the ground, so pad holding needs to reflect this unique part of the sport. While Kickboxing and Thai Boxing padwork will develop great striking skills, they need to be modified in order to work for MMA.

The stance in Kickboxing for example is too high to be effective in MMA. Standing tall with straight legs (which helps with kicking) reduces an athlete's ability to sprawl and wrestle effectively. The same applies to a Boxing stance, which is lower than the Kickboxing stance, but is too side on, making grappling and kicking harder. MMA is a new sport and therefore has its own unique stance. When holding pads, make sure that the MMA fighter always returns to a stance that is effective for the sport. The legs should never be straight with the knees locked; and it is important that the hips face forward at all times, to allow the fighter to shoot for a takedown or sprawl.

When holding pads for MMA, make sure that all the disciplines and ranges are trained on the pads. In the early days of MMA, fighters trained Muay Thai on the pads, wrestling at a wrestling club and submission in a gi at a Brazilian Ju Jitsu Academy. This compartmentalised approach to training developed disjointed fighters, who had a hard time applying their skills in a fluid dynamic situation. Modern MMA fighters still train the separate disciplines of MMA, but also regularly practice them in an integrated fashion. Modern MMA padwork includes standing striking from the MMA stance, clinching to takedowns and grappling on the ground with striking. Focus mitts are the ideal tool to practice integrated padwork, because Thai pads tend to be a bit cumbersome to use effectively, especially when grappling.

Over the past 10 years many new drills have been developed to closely replicate the technical and fitness demands of an MMA fight. Coaches nowadays use padwork to check on a fighter's transitions and integration. Transitions refer to how smoothly a fighter moves between the standing striking, takedowns and the groundwork. A fighter with good transitions is hard to beat as they have less openings and gaps in their defence. Poor transitions in MMA leave a fighter vulnerable and off position. MMA padwork is simply a matter of designing combinations that are effective and easy to perform, that also cover the transitions from standing to the ground and from the ground back to standing. It is important as a coach to choose techniques and combinations that are high percentage and easy for most fighters to learn. Because MMA is essentially a mix of four or five Martial Arts, it is quite easy to become overwhelmed by the sheer number of techniques that can be performed. A discerning and discriminating eye is needed to sift through all the possible techniques and find the key essential moves that make a difference most of the time in a fight. After training at many different MMA schools and academies, I have come to realise that the instructor's
primary passion tends to dictate the type of training available. For example BJJ instructors naturally tend to favour the ground more than stand-up. Vice versa, Thai Boxers tend to prefer the stand-up more than the ground. To be a truly complete Mixed Martial Artist, it is important to avoid having preferential areas of interest. Favouring one style or range above all others tends to limit one’s ability to adapt and fight effectively. This is quite common in amateur MMA, where Kickboxers and Thai Boxers find they get taken down and controlled by wrestlers. In this situation many fighters get frustrated and lose the fight because they were unable to adapt both technically and mentally to the reality of the situation.

Even at the elite level (like the UFC), it is still common to see professional fighters who are extremely one-dimensional. They have their strengths, at which they are very good, but when taken out of their preferred skill set, they tend to be uncomfortable and end up losing fights. Equal time should be spent training each of the ranges of MMA, including standing striking, wrestling, ground and pound, and submissions. They should also be trained together in a fluid and dynamic manner that closely mimics a MMA fight.

Therefore, MMA pad training has to include:

- Takedowns.
- Anti-takedown striking (using striking to stop being thrown to the mat).
- Dirty Boxing (which is striking within the clinch).
- Ground and pound (striking on the ground).
- Anti-ground pound (defending against strikes on the ground).
- Scrambling back to your feet from the ground.

The more successful MMA coaches include all of these elements when working the pads.

If any of these areas are missed during training, the fighter is left unprepared when it comes to fight night. I am continually shocked by the number of gyms that allow beginners to compete without all the skills they need to survive. It is very unprofessional, if not downright dangerous, to let a novice fight without adequately preparing them. Many times, I have seen new guys knocked out or choked unconscious because they were poorly trained.

**Drill 92. MMA takedowns**

The most common MMA takedowns are the double leg, single leg and body lock takedown. Of these the double leg is the hardest takedown to master as it involves many technical steps to perform correctly. The single leg is a takedown based on controlling one of your opponent’s legs and using pressure on the thigh to drive them to the ground. The body lock takedown requires a fighter to wrap their arms tight around their partner’s hips or lower back, and use this grip to lift, trip or bump their partner to the ground. Regardless of the specific takedown, they all tend to be more effective if set up with strikes first. A striking combination that lands, will damage or off-balance an opponent, allowing for a takedown. Even if the striking combination misses, it will still serve to distract from the following takedown.

As takedowns require quickly closing distance in order to grab hold of the partner, striking set-ups need to be effective in bridging the gap between the fighters. Just charging in from a distance, wildly swinging as you attempt to grab hold of the opponent, is a recipe for a knee to the face. There is a strategic way to strike in order to effectively set up a takedown. Simple one to three punch combinations, usually ending with the lead hand, are some of the best set-ups for MMA takedowns. Ending the combination with the lead hand allows the fighter to return to a stable stance, to execute a takedown. Good punching combinations to set up the takedowns discussed, include:
1. Double Jab, Takedown

This combination is a low risk strategy, because the right hand is kept close to head to defend, as a jab is used to bridge the gap and obscure the opponent’s vision.

2. Jab, Cross, Jab, Takedown

The jab cross jab combination uses an aggressive one-two attack to back the opponent up swiftly, followed by a jab to bridge the gap and get the takedown.

3. Jab, Cross, Hook, Takedown

This is a very effective combination taught to me by World Champion Erik Paulson. All three punches can be targeted at the head, or a more effective combination is to throw the jab high, cross to the body and hook to the head. Not only does this allow a fighter to move from long distance into clinch range seamlessly, but it can also overwhelm the opponent’s defences as you hit targets high and low.

“How TO ADD THIS”

Drill each takedown combination repetitively, working on closing the distance smoothly, while striking and keeping the guard hand up at all times. The punching combinations can be followed with any takedown, such as a single leg, double leg or body tackle depending on your preferences and skills.

Once the techniques have been integrated the pad holder can call

“Double one – takedown”

Or

“One – two – one – takedown”

Or

“One – two – three – takedown”

The person striking the pads can decide the takedown they wish to use.

Drill 93. Anti-takedown padwork

There are five barriers that can be used by a fighter to defend the takedown. The first barrier is foot work. Good defensive footwork will keep the fighter out of danger by creating the angles and distance needed to avoid a charging opponent. In order for a takedown to be effective, the person performing it needs to get as close as possible. It is very difficult to get a takedown on an experienced opponent from far away. Trying to shoot a double leg takedown from halfway across the cage rarely works. If a fighter is looking to avoid being taken down, their first line of defence is to use good footwork to control distance and keep their opponent off-balance and out of position.
The second barrier that can be used in MMA to prevent the takedown is the extended arm, or post, as it is sometimes called. As the fighter notices the opponent changing levels to attempt a takedown, a straightened arm is used to deflect the opponent's advance to one side. The palm of the hand can be placed on the shoulder, neck, head or chest and is used to redirect the charge. Keep the other hand high to protect against any random punches. This technique is most effective when the person performing it steps to the side, away from the tackle. Sweat, blood and Vaseline makes fighters slippery and there is a chance that the post may slip off and result in a takedown if the fighter stays in front of their opponent. Imagine being a matador stepping out of the way of a charging bull when using this technique.

If the opponent manages to get past the post, the next line of defence is the bent arm. The arm is kept bent and wedged between the fighters to keep the opponent off the legs, and to stop them grabbing their hands together. It is harder to take a person down if the hands are not clasped or locked together, so the bent arm wedge is used to keep the opponent away, whilst taking the hips back and circling. Using both hands, this is similar to the Thai clinch position (commonly known as plumm), but the fighter cannot stand erect like they would in Thai Boxing, as it is still easy to get a body lock takedown from this position. The hips need to drive backwards and away while pressure is being exerted by the arms.

If the opponent gets past the arms, hip movement is required to stop the takedown. Blocking or bumping with the hips helps delay the takedown until hands can be utilised to underhook and escape. Hip blocking is most effective against double leg takedowns, where the hips are driven strongly into the opponent, halting their advance and allowing the arms to quickly pummel.

Sprawling is the last line of defence as the opponent has bypassed the other defensive methods and got in on the body or hips. Sprawling is a coordinated movement of the body, driving the hips down onto the opponent's head, whilst kicking the legs back to the floor, flattening the opponent onto the mat and sliding the legs away from their grip. Simple!

When sprawling, drive the hips straight to the mat as hard as possible, while kicking the legs wide so that there is a good base under the fighter; and pummel the hands to remove the arms gripping the legs. Without all these things happening simultaneously, there is still a chance that the takedown will be successful.

Sprawling can be practiced on the pads: either by the pad holder dipping as if to execute a takedown,
and the pad striker sprawling on the floor in response; or the pad holder can actually attempt the takedown and force the sprawl, but this is hard on the pad holder’s body. Getting sprawled on repeatedly is not fun!

**“HOW TO ADD THIS”**

*When performing MMA padwork the pad holder can call*

- “Post”
- “Wedge”
- “Sprawl”

*and then initiate a takedown and the person striking has to perform the appropriate defence.*

---

**Drill 94. Dirty Boxing**

Dirty Boxing was made popular in the UFC by wrestlers such as Randy Couture and Jon Fitch. These Greco Roman wrestlers found they were effective in controlling the clinch and striking to set up takedowns. Dirty Boxing which involves controlling the head and arms of an opponent, whilst throwing short hooks, uppercuts and elbows; which has now become an integral part of MMA training. The person who controls the clinch is also usually the person who can control where the fight takes place. A good clinch makes takedowns easier as the fighter has already got in close and is controlling the opponent’s head, shoulders or hips.

The best tools for Dirty Boxing are close range punching and elbows. Short tight hooks and uppercuts are particularly effective, as the other hand can be used to pull the opponent’s head into the punch, increasing its impact. Elbows can be used in tight spaces and do a lot of damage, as the tip of the elbow is extremely sharp. Because of this, elbows are often used to try to cause cuts above or around the eyes. By the way, all of this is called Dirty Boxing, because the techniques described above are illegal in regular Boxing, but they are allowed in MMA.

Dirty Boxing is practiced on the pads by having the coach or pad holder clinch and position the pads for close range strikes. This helps the fighter learn how to develop power in a small space, whilst maintaining good defensive wrestling.

**Shoulder barge**

Using the shoulder to manipulate the distance between you and your opponent is known as shoulder bumping. The shoulder is a useful tool in close when the hands are busy clinching or striking. The most simple shoulder bump is the shoulder barge, where the shoulder is quickly snapped forward in order to create space to throw a strike. Barging the shoulder forward bumps the opponent backwards, and the distance created can be filled with a fist or elbow.
Knee Bump

The knee bump is used where there is contact between both fighter's knees. A small bump of an opponent's knee will destroy the stability of their base. In the following diagram the left knee is bumped which moves the opponent's head across and down leaving it open to an uppercut.

Elbow lift

In close range, it is possible to lift the opponent's elbow away from their body, exposing their ribs to an uppercut. This needs to be done quickly to be effective. A sharp pull of the elbow away from the body creates enough space to sneak a cheeky uppercut to the body or head.

Elbow scoop

The elbow scoop is also applied in close, but in this situation the hand is bought over the opponent's elbow as it is scooped to the side, opening the body to a hook or uppercut.

Behind the neck punch

This is a fun technique, it is not a power shot but rather an irritating and frustrating punch. From the half guard, the rear hand is punched behind your neck and to the side of the opponent's head. It is unlikely that anyone would be knocked out by such a punch, but it is fun to apply in sparring with friends and makes you feel like the love child of Bruce Lee and Chuck Norris.
Hammer the thigh (not shown)

This is a technique used in MMA when standing grappling. The hammer, or wrist, is quickly chopped down into the outer thigh, just above the knee. Several of these shots in quick succession are enough to hurt the leg, and will effect the opponent’s ability to move and kick later in the round.

Hinge punch

The hinge punch starts from the lower half guard and utilises a short tight hook with the lead hand, which makes use of the hinge motion of the elbow, hence its name.

All of these Dirty Boxing tricks need to be mixed with close range punching (predominantly hooks and uppercuts) in order to confuse and overwhelm the opponent. In MMA the addition of close range knees and elbows also increases their effectiveness.

“HOW TO ADD THIS”

Once in clinch range the pad holder can call

“Shoulder bump”
“Knee bump”
“Elbow lift”
“Elbow scoop”
“Down hammer”

and place a pad in the correct position demonstrated.

Drill 95. Clinch Kicking

Generally kicking is usually used at long range, but it is possible to kick in clinch range, it just requires a few minor modifications. Kicking whilst close is unpredictable and very effective as it combines the power of a kick with the ability to pull the person forward into the strike, essentially doubling or tripling the impact.

Thai clinch & front kick

This kick is used from the Thai clinch. Instead of performing the usual skip knees, the striker skips one leg back, lifts the knee high and using the ball of the foot, kicks to the lower abdomen. This kick is surprisingly hard and really hurts when it hits, especially if the bladder or solar plexus is targeted.
Thai clinch & curve shin

This is a technique I learnt from Erik Paulson. The problem with trying to do a regular round kick in clinch range is that it puts the body out of position for grappling. When clinching, it is always best to keep the hips facing the opponent, as this allows for strong kneeing and prevents throws and takedowns. Erik solved this problem by essentially performing a round kick, but with no hip turn. The striking surface is not the top of the shin but the side of the shin. Whilst not as powerful as a traditional round kick, believe me it still hurts. It is easier to apply by pulling the person to the same side as the curve shin, as this prevents the pad holder from being able to lift their leg to block and increases impact.

Thai clinch & heel hack

The heel hack is a very simple strike using the heel in a downward hooking direction. The heel is a very hard part of the foot but it can be difficult to use at long range. From the Thai clinch, however, it is easy to lift the knee and quickly pull the heel through the target. The hack can be delivered to the belly of the calf, hamstring or the sciatic nerve. All these target areas affect how the leg functions. Repeated strikes to the same target will slow footwork, make leg blocking more difficult and reduce the power of the opponent's kicks. Yippee!

Thai clinch & up shin kick

Kicks to the head are possible in the clinch. From the standard Thai clinch, both hands are moved to one side of the pad holder's head. This allows the head to be pulled down into a rising upward shin kick. A certain degree of flexibility in the hamstrings is needed to allow the shin kick to rise correctly. If the leg muscles are not flexible enough, then the kick will lack power or in extreme cases may result in a rather amusing hamstring tear. So make sure you stretch before attempting this kick.

“How to add this”

Once in clinch range the clinch range kicks can be called by the pad holder, or carefully used at random by the striker.
GROUND & POUND

Ground and pound is striking whilst on the ground. It involves using punches, hammers and elbows when either on top of an opponent or from underneath. MMA fighters spend a considerable amount of time training this part of the fight game, as many knockouts happen via ground and pound. Just as in standing striking there are basic combinations to be drilled and set-ups and fakes that are important. Ground and pound striking needs to be practiced from four main positions on the ground: mount, side control, back control and guard. As the fighter is usually on their knees in these positions the strikes need to be practiced in order to learn how to maximise power. It is still possible to drive from the toes through the body whilst on the knees, but it takes lots of practice to master. Practising ground and pound with a punch-bag on the floor is the best place to start, as you can work on generating power without worrying about hurting the pad holder. Maintaining a stable base is very important on the ground. Over-committed punches that throw the body out of position can result in getting swept, or worse, ending up in a submission. Punches and elbows on the ground need to be kept short, controlled and snappy, to make sure balance and posture is maintained at all times.

Drill 96. Basic ground and pound drills from guard

1. 10 punch blitz
2. Body, body, head
3. Folding elbow
4. Arm trap and punch
5. Fake head punch to body punch
6. Back elbow to thigh

10 punch blitz

The 10 punch blitz is an assault designed to overwhelm the opponent with a sustained barrage of knuckles to the face. It can be applied in any position on the ground, mount, knee on belly, guard etc. In all these positions, maintaining good posture is necessary to maximise power and leverage. However the body mechanics for striking on the ground are slightly different from standing. When standing, the elbows are usually kept down to protect the ribs and maintain non telegraphic initiation. On the ground this is not required, so the elbows can rise to help increase power. Punches are delivered quickly with the elbows kept high to maximise distance and impact. The shoulders should also rotate into each punch.

Body hook, body hook, head hook

The problem with just using straight punches is that the opponent can block them on their arms. It is then smart to use hooking punches to strike around their protective arms. By using a hook punch to the body twice, the opponent’s hands are drawn down to protect the ribs opening their head to the final power hook.
The folding or push off elbow

Elbows are super dangerous on the ground. The close range, coupled with the fact that the opponent’s head is usually resting on the mat, means that many fights have been ended by a solid elbow strike... or two ... or three. The simplest way to use an elbow on the ground is by using a folding technique. The palm of the glove is pushed onto the head to immobilise and control, and the arm quickly folded in half. This snaps the tip of the elbow down into the target. This technique is also effective if the opponent gets wrist control by grabbing the gloves to stop being punched. By dropping the elbow over the top in a circular motion, the tip of the elbow lands and this simultaneously frees the trapped hand enabling it to continue punching.

The arm trap and punch

This uses the same standing pull trap as detailed on Page 103, but is performed typically from the closed guard. The pad holder’s hand is pulled tightly across their body. With one of the pads momentarily trapped, the other can be held for punches or elbows.

Fake high punch to body punch (not shown)

Fakes work when standing or when ground fighting. In this technique, the hand is drawn up high to catch the opponent’s attention and a fake punch to the head is initiated; as the opponent starts to cover, the punch is redirected to the body. Of course, this combination can be reversed with a fake to the body first and then a head punch. As with standing fakes the ability to “sell” the fake convincingly is vital.

Back elbow to thigh

Whilst stuck in guard, the opponent may do a good job of protecting their head and body, so alternative targets need to be exploited. One of the easiest to strike is the upper thigh. The elbow is quickly driven backward into the opponent’s leg and if repeated several times may force them to open their guard.

“How TO ADD THIS”

In guard the pad holder can call
“Blitz” to get a 10 punch barrage
“Body, body, head”
“Push off elbow”
“Trap and punch”
“Fake”
“Elbow spike” to get an elbow to the thigh
Drill 97. Anti-ground and pound drills

It is never a good idea to let an angry, muscular person sit on your chest and elbow you in the face. Learning how to defend against strikes on the ground is just as important, if not more important than learning how to defend strikes whilst standing. This is because your head has nowhere to move when you are stuck on the ground so knockouts are more common. They are essentially three ways to defend ground and pound. For ease of understanding the following drills are demonstrated from guard but can be applied in all ground positions.

Posture control

By holding the person close to your body there is little space for them to generate power in their strikes. What the person on top wants to do is posture up with their body erect and strike down using gravity. The person underneath wants the opposite, they want to hold their opponent close using their legs and arms to minimise the damage they take. Notice in the picture, how one arm is tightly wrapped and the other hand holds the back of the head.

Wrist or arm control

Controlling the wrist or arms is also an effective way of limiting ground and pound. Holding tightly onto the wrists can momentarily prevent strikes landing. It is better to wrap tightly around the opponent’s upper arm, as this controls the arms more effectively and offers more options for submissions. Wrapping around the upper arm and tightly squeezing the elbow to the body, forces an opponent to waste valuable energy trying to get their arm free and may present an opportunity to escape. Sometimes, however, the wrist is all you can get, so grab and hold on for dear life.

Distance control

If the opponent is striking, and it is difficult to effectively control their posture or wrap their arms, then increasing distance is the only other option. The feet need to be placed on the opponent’s hips and the knees driven up into the opponent’s chest as the butt is lifted off the ground. This maximises the distance from the opponent and prevents strikes landing cleanly. Both hands need to be kept up to block any wayward strikes and the opponent can then be kicked away enabling a quick scramble back to the feet.
\textbf{Drill 98. Striking off the back}

It can be difficult to strike effectively off one's back as one cannot use bodyweight or gravity to generate power. Strikes from on top will always be more powerful than strikes from underneath. That is not to say that damage cannot be done from underneath, but the priority should always be to get back on top as fast as possible. Short hooks and hammers to the side of the head can irritate an opponent and force them to move, giving the fighter an opportunity to escape. These types of strikes, while not massively powerful, can accumulate damage as the fight progresses.

A good technique to use from this position is the push away elbow, mentioned previously. The opponent’s head is pushed away with the palm. As the opponent pushes back to resist, a quick snap elbow is used as the head travels forward. This car crash effect of the head moving into the elbow can cause significant damage (read big cuts). Many fights have been stopped as a result of using this push away elbow. The Spike elbow, if thrown in a horizontal direction, is also useful when fighting off the back and can be devastating when repeatedly used. The Spike elbow is illegal in MMA if thrown vertically from 12 to 6, so this technique cannot be used. In fact, UFC champion John “Bones” Jones was disqualified for using the 12-6 elbow on Matt Hamill in TUF 10. Ooops!

It is risky to stay on bottom and strike, as the person on top only has to connect cleanly once to do real damage. Striking from underneath should only be used for as long as necessary to create a scramble or set up a submission. After 10 years of watching MMA, I don’t think I’ve ever seen a fighter win from strikes underneath, unless it involves an up kick to the chin. So get back on top as soon as possible please.

\textbf{“HOW TO ADD THIS”}

\textit{With the pad holder in guard, short light strikes from underneath can be delivered to the focus mitts or the pad holder’s head (if they don’t mind).}
as a person with the pads will be looking to strike and pass the guard. On several occasions, this kick has resulted in a knockout or the person falling into a submission. Lots of time should be spent working on this kick, it is very powerful.

**Heel hack from guard**

Another effective kick from guard is the heel hack explained on Page 135. The guard is momentarily opened and the heel driven downwards into the ribs, outer thigh, calf or ankle. Whilst this is obviously not a knockout kick, it is extremely irritating for the person being struck, especially if the same area is hit over and over with the heel. As the opponent moves in order to avoid the repeated heel strikes, it creates opportunities for escape.

**Roundhouse kick from sit up guard**

If the fighter is in the sit up guard, they have the ability to round kick with either leg by shifting their weight to either side, putting their hand on the ground and rotating into the kick. This is more effective if the non-kicking leg can be placed on the ground with the ball of the foot driven into the floor to help rotation. A surprising amount of power can be generated by this kick and it can be delivered to the leg, to the body, and even the head. The momentum from this kick can also be used to spin the fighter back to their feet and away from the opponent. This is an excellent drill to practice on the mitts: sit up guard, high round kick to stand up.

**Sidekick and stomp**

The sit up guard also enables the fighter to sidekick the opponent’s knee with the leg that is on top and stomp kick with the leg that is underneath. Lifting the hips off the ground whilst stomping enables the fighter to step back after delivering the kick and regain their feet. This is commonly known as a technical getup in Brazilian Jui Jitsu and MMA. The stomp to the knee and technical getup is the safest way to get back to one’s feet, as it uses the stomp to keep the opponent at bay, allows the fighter to keep at least one hand up guarding, and takes the head away from the opponent while getting up.
All of these MMA specific padwork drills need to be trained regularly to help the fighter learn the fundamental skills needed to be effective in the cage. They can be trained individually for time (such as one round), or chained together in a free manner. Obviously when learning a new technique it is best to spend a few rounds becoming familiar with the mechanics and positioning. Once this learning process has been completed, the technique can be integrated with other drills.

If an MMA fight is scheduled and the opponent is known, it should be possible to gather information about their preferred fighting style from the internet. The coach can then form a strategy to neutralise the opponent’s strengths and exploit their weaknesses. For example if the opponent is a strong wrestler with good takedowns, then a lot of padwork needs to be performed on defending the takedown and getting back to the feet. If they are a ground and pound specialist, then many pad rounds need to be devoted to anti-ground and pound drills and scrambling back up to standing. Always formulate a game-plan when you have information on an opponent.

**TOP TRAINING TIP**

**‘ICE’**

Any bruising or other soft tissue injury needs to be iced as soon as possible to minimise swelling. 10 minutes ice on, 10 minutes off is best. Repeat as often as needed during the first 24 hours after the injury.
As with Kickboxing, it is possible to perform longer combinations in order to improve technique and develop cardio. These longer combinations are not designed to be applied in their entirety, but rather emphasise how to flow smoothly between techniques. The long MMA combo incorporates standing striking, ground & pound, takedowns, takedown defence and submissions. It therefore, trains all the essential skill sets needed to be successful in the cage. By practising this regularly it also improves the transitions between each technique. Smooth, fast transitions are the hallmark of the experienced professional fighter.

Drill 100. Long MMA Combo

1. Right round kick
2. Short knee
3. Jab, cross
4. **Pad holder falls to their back**
5. Grab heels and kick legs
6. Matador pass (throw the legs to the side)
7. Knee on belly & 4 punches
8. **Pad holder pushes knee off belly**
9. Sprawl to side control
10. 3 knees to body
11. Step or slide to mount
12. 4 punches, 4 hammers & 2 elbows each side
13. **Pad holder wraps an arm, traps a leg and bridges and rolls to guard**
14. Wrist control & shrimp hips back to open guard
15. **Pad holder stands up**
16. Up kick, knee stomp & technical get up to feet
17. Fake jab & shoot a double leg
18. **Pad holder sprawls**
18. Sit out from under the sprawl
19. Take back and put hooks in, punch over and under arms
20. Flatten out pad holder with your legs and finish with a choke
21. Get your arm raised, don’t forget to thank me in your victory speech

Start slowly with this drill. Initially work on transitioning smoothly and executing each technique as technically as possible. Once the skills and movements have been mastered, more power can be added. This drill can be made more challenging by doubling up the ground strikes. For example, instead of performing four punches and hammers, the fighter can deliver eight punches and hammers.

Another way of increasing the intensity, is to perform the entire drill five times through consecutively full power on the Thai pads. This will really test the fighter’s fitness, because they have to keep working hard as fatigue sets in. The pad holder must ensure that technique remains sharp and precise, any sloppy or incomplete movements must be repeated before the drill can continue. Harsh, but necessary.
So here we are at the end of the book. This has been the hardest chapter to write. It is very hard to decide what to include and how to summarise 20 years experience. If you follow the structure outlined in this book and train each section consistently, you will get better both at pad holding and fighting. Consistency is the key. Flicking through the book and doing a drill for five minutes once a week won't do you any favours. Spend at least 30-50 rounds drilling each technique and then integrate it into your pad training and sparring. I often have students say to me, “I can’t get this technique to work”, I usually ask them how long they have been practising and they say, “10 minutes”. I tell them to come back once they have practiced for 5 hours. Discipline will solve most problems in the gym and in life.

When learning anything new try to start with the correct technical execution first, followed by footwork, head movement, speed and power. Training in this fashion will speed up your progress, so save the power till the end and get your technique down first. Remember Bruce Lee’s famous words, “Absorb what is useful, reject what is useless and add what is uniquely your own”. Take what is taught here, train what is useful and personalise it to make it your own.

I thought I might like to finish with a few important lessons I have learnt in gyms and academies here and around the world.

**Lesson 1. Longevity**

Think about the longevity of your training. Are you planning to train for five, ten or fifty years? This really affects how you approach training. If you are only going to train for a short time and maybe have a few fights, then go hard all the time and have fun. But if you are like me, and are going to train for the rest of your life, then training needs to be managed more carefully to avoid burnout and injury. Training hard all the time is unsustainable. Eventually, the accumulated damage breaks the body down. This is manageable when you are twenty, but much harder to cope with when you are forty, with a wife, two kids and a pet gerbil. As the body ages you need to train smarter rather than harder. Older athletes need to structure their training better, rest more and take care of any injuries quickly. Training for the older athlete should be organised so that hard sessions are not repeated too close together. For example, heavy weight training shouldn’t be followed by hard sparring on the same day, because it places too much stress on the nervous system. Plus, if you are tired from lifting weights, you are unlikely to spar to the best of your ability. Older Martial Artists need their training to be carefully and thoughtfully structured to maximise performance without overwhelming the athlete.
Injuries can also take longer to heal for an older athlete, so it is vital to get treatment as soon as possible to prevent them from lingering. Try to see a physiotherapist on the same day you get injured, as this will halve recovery time. Train hard but train smart.

**Lesson 2. Remember life is about relationships**

Enjoy your time training. If you do Martial Arts for any length time, you will meet many great people, make a few lifelong friends and most importantly have great fun. Fighting is a serious business, but training doesn’t have to be serious all the time. Remember you chose this path so enjoy the journey, make friends and laugh as much as possible. What you will remember when you look back is not the titles or trophies you won, but the people who walked the path with you.

**Lesson 3. Don’t forget the basics**

It is tempting after a few years training to get mesmerised with fancy new techniques and forget the basics. Basics are what make a fighter great. If you watch elite level Martial Artists, they spend a considerable amount of time maintaining their basic skills. Never get to a point where you think that basic training or beginner’s classes are beneath you. I still spend considerable time training my basics in striking, wrestling and grappling and the more I work, the more I realise there is a lot left to learn. If all else fails, you can always go back to your basics.

**Lesson 4. Stay Humble and keep an open mind**

All the top level Martial Artists I have ever met or trained with seem remarkably humble and down to earth. Martial Arts are founded on respect. Respect for yourself, respect for your training partner’s and respect for your instructors. Part of being respectful is understanding humility. Just because you are the best boxer in your area, doesn’t mean you are the best fighter. Just because you can kick, doesn’t mean you can’t get taken down and choked out. Just because you have won a few titles, doesn’t make you anything special. Lots of people have won lots of things. Remember there are always people out there who can kick your ass, so stay humble and learn from everyone. Beginners can teach you just as much as a black belt.
Lesson 5. Try not to act like a idiot

So you have won a few fights and feel pretty confident. Try not to let it go to your head. Keep a realistic sense of perspective. Fighting in a ring or cage, whilst a little scary and challenging, is well controlled and relatively safe. Conversely, I have a friend in the Army who has experienced numerous combat situations where he has had to kill and could have been killed himself. He is also the nicest guy you could ever meet. He has no need to act macho or posture, he is confident in his abilities and has nothing to prove. He is my definition of a true warrior. People who have to act aggressively are usually trying to hide a weakness or insecurity. Be calm, be kind and be friendly.

Lesson 6. Expect plateaus

You will experience plateaus and low points in anything you do for any length of time. Relationships, work and training can all get a bit stale over time, unless you continually find ways to make it challenging, fun and inspiring.

I have been training 25 years and there have been times when I have thought about easing up or stopping for a bit, but I keep going, because I realised that this feeling is just temporary. I have felt it before and I will feel it again. To stop training after 25 years of effort and dedication, because of a momentary lack of desire is crazy. During these times I speak to my instructors to get some perspective, look at ways to spice up my training and set new challenges. You have to expect plateaus and plan for how you will handle them or they will take you by surprise.

No one I know, who has stopped doing Martial Arts, has ever said that their life is better as a result of stopping. Life is always worse. They lose their fitness and vitality. They lose their connection to a group of positive like minded people and they feel a lot of effort, time and money has been wasted. In my experience the only way out is through. You have to keep going and know that the joy will return. Trust me on this, I have been doing Martial Arts for a very long time. Keep training and you will find your bliss.

I hope you have enjoyed my book. Let me know how your training is going and any improvements I can make to the Mitt Master system.

Please check my website www.MittMaster.com to see some of the drills in this book performed and to find information about training in the Mitt Master system.

Thank you.

Train hard, train smart and have fun.

Matt Chapman
Good pad holding is one of the most important skills in combat sports. It can make the difference between a world champion and a nobody.

Written by Matthew Chapman

Photography & Design by ItzDave Media