

Framing the Budo

Psychology uses the term “framing” to suggest that anything presented must be presented in a context. If you say, “Would you prefer an apple or that bruised banana?” you are not simply offering two different fruits but a framed banana (it is bruised rather than normal) as against a non-framed (implying that it is not damaged at all) apple. That non-framed apple ends up being, in essence, framed.

In the martial arts, we frame what we study in many ways. One of those ways is in our preferred naming convention. We may call the art we practice a *budo*, a *martial art*, or *self-defense*.

A **budo** is a “martial way” probably of Japanese origin since the word itself is Japanese. The “way” implies a spiritual, or at least a mental, concentration within a physical training format. Strictly speaking, a *budo* does not have to imply combat, or even self-defense. What a *budo* emphasizes depends on which part of the word, Bu or Do, is emphasized in the training. Do you meditate for ten minutes, exercise for twenty minutes and cooperatively go through a regimen based on distantly martial training (punching, throwing, two-person forms) for thirty more? Or do you warm up for ten minutes, drill for twenty, and go through an increasingly challenging martial regimen (like one-step sparring, attack and defense drills, and reaction drills) for thirty? If *budo* is your frame, it is a wider, more varied frame than you may have thought.

A **martial art**, strictly speaking, is an Art first (since that is the noun) and is Martial second (since that is a modifying adjective). Similar to emphasizing Do over Bu, in a martial art, one is cognizant not of the art’s martial origins but the artistry itself, much as one would be in yoga or dance. We know the art has its origins in older, usually Asian, martial training, but our emphasis is on how aesthetically pleasing, or anatomically beneficial our movements are. Of course many people emphasize the adjective, making it an **artistic martial practice**, closer for all practical purposes to an amalgam of *budo* and self-defense.

Self-defense can be a broad category and may include such personal protection items as securing one’s home, car, or purse, preparing for a famine, flood, or fire, and arming oneself with pepper spray, stiletto, or Smith and Wesson. But you may not consider the category broad at all. For you, self-defense may be simple, practical, street-wise knee-him-in-the-groin stuff closer to Model Mugging than to Moo Duk Kwan, Kyokushinkai, or Choi Lay Fut. Strictly speaking this sort of self-defense should be termed something like **personal attack protection**.

We frame our martial art with our techniques, our attitudes in practice, how much we interact with our partners, how often we challenge ourselves, etc. Once we set the frame, it seems the default position that other martial arts are respected only if they have set a similar frame and come up to our levels of filling that frame. It is the martial artist’s way of making his apple shine in a field of bruised bananas.

Consider a fruit salad for a moment. If prepackaged, it may not be to your taste, but if you buy the desired fruits and prepare them yourself, you get exactly what you want. That’s why so many people since the seventies have created hybrid and offshoot systems of martial study. Not only do they want a technique mix that

satisfies what they think is relative to their needs, but also they want a framing that is relative to their needs. They want their ideal balance of physical, mental, spiritual, artistic, and slam-dunk. Unfortunately, they also want to buy it in a just the right-sized can from the local supermarket on their preferred shopping day, at just the right price.

Another way to see this view of budo/martial arts/self-defense is this: most people are not interested in learning to paint but would love to display their ideal self-portrait over the mantelpiece. Of course, even then they would probably have to depend on someone else to frame it.