

How to Choose a Martial Arts School

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NOTE: This article addresses the needs of non-martial artists. Martial arts instructors might find it useful to attach to their brochures.

Would you consider applying to a college on the basis of its convenient location or because Mr. Smith next door went there? A martial arts school can and should be a type of educational institute for you or your child. Choose your teacher and your school as carefully as you would a university for they can easily end up being just as influential in your development. Unfortunately, what you should know to make an informed decision can be overwhelming. In the next few articles, I'll try to underwhelm the process.

Did you know, for instance, that there are both traditional and contemporary martial arts or that there are Chinese, Okinawan, Korean and Japanese martial arts? Did you know there are arts that concentrate on kicking; others on striking; others on throwing and locking; and still others on weaponry? Or, function as sport; others as street defense, self-development or all sorts of combinations thereof? Did you know that there are “studios,” and “training halls?” Were you aware that there were private academies and martial businesses?

This article series is meant to help. If you or a friend may be interested in the martial arts, please look for this column for the next few weeks and copy it for future reference.

In response to our title, the obvious response is to shop around. But if you do not know what to look for, you can be convinced that almost anything is right for you. If you don't take your own martial arts education seriously, you can too easily be enrolled in an art that is attractive because of its initial mystery but that may not help you reach your goals. Learn as much as you can *before* you shop around!

Ask yourself: (1) **Why** do I want to study a martial art? Self-defense? Self-development? Sport competition? To practice as an art form? As a cultural or spiritual study?

(2) **How long** am I willing to be taught before I decide to fully commit to in-depth study? Or is in-depth study a possibility at all?

(3) **What sort** of martial art can I see myself doing regularly?

Write down the honest answers to these questions and start making phone calls. Get information! Instead of asking general questions such as “Do you have something I can do Mondays and Wednesdays?” which will no doubt get an affirmative response from the person on the other end, ask a more specific, “What type of martial art do you teach? Is it oriented to punching and kicking, or locking and throwing? Do you enter competitions? What is its primary emphasis?”

Judge the school as much from the quality and sincerity of the phone response as the answers they give. If it sounds scripted, it probably is. Once you have made a list of potential schools you are interested in, call back and set up an appointment to watch a regular class in process, not a set-up private lesson (which can easily turn into a sales presentation.) Go home and compare all your notes. Once your information is as complete as possible, choose the school that seems best for you and commit to at least three months trial period. If they

insist on more, drop them. And, to be honest, if you think you don't want to commit to at least three months, you are probably not ready to investigate serious martial arts study.

Next, we'll continue your martial arts education by discussing the numerous styles available to you in today's martial arts world.

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