

# The Ultimate Guide to Beginning Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu

A photograph of two men practicing Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu on a dark mat. One man is on the ground in a guard position, wearing a dark gi with 'ORIGIA' written on the sleeve. The other man is on top, wearing a white gi with 'ORIGIA' on the sleeve, performing a technique. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

Randy Brown

*Maximize your success. Know your mission.*

## Welcome

Let me start by welcoming you to the amazing world of Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu, also known as BJJ. Whether you want to be a deadly ground fighter, or just know some handy ways to escape, or prevent someone from pinning you on the ground, BJJ is the answer!

Brazilian jiu-jitsu is one of the best ground fighting martial arts on the planet. When combined with a striking/stand-up art, it makes you a martial artist with a well rounded and capable skillset to be effective in a multitude of circumstances.

BJJ can also be focused on by itself. Enjoyed as a challenging hobby, or sport, or taken to the competition arena to test one's mettle against opponents far and wide. You may know what you want from the start, or discover your goals months or years into training.

No matter what path you choose, the journey is amazing and will turn you into a powerful adversary. Challenge, strengthening of mind, body, and spirit, stamina, and coordination are a few of the exceptional side benefits to training BJJ. Your greatest asset will be your grit. That single skill will earn you success in this art.

Let's get started!

Randy  
BJJ Coach - Black Belt

# Belts



The belt structure in Brazilian jiu-jitsu is simple for adults - White, Blue, Purple, Brown, Black. Kids ranks were added later as the art grew in popularity. The ranks for kids - White, Gray, Yellow, Orange, Green.

You may already have heard that earning belts in BJJ is extremely difficult. Someone could have told you this, or perhaps you witnessed a friend, or family member go through the process. This could be the first you are reading about it. No matter where you heard this, it is true. The 'average' black belt in BJJ is 8 to 10 years. Kids are not allowed to be black belts, already increasing the seriousness and integrity of the art. Which is also why separate ranks were added later when children began learning the art.

## Ranking Faster

Is it possible to speed up the time it takes to achieve a Black Belt level of skill in BJJ? This is a tough question. Most of it depends on us. Below I will lay out some strategies for you on how to improve your chances of gaining rank faster, but there are two caveats we must keep in mind.

First, your instructor. Each instructor has different standards for each rank. Some test, some do not. Some push competition, others abstain. Rank qualification is arbitrary and can be sped up, or delayed by a coach for a variety of reasons. My advice to you on this - do not ask the coach. It can be deemed impolite depending on your coach, and could delay you getting promoted.

Belts are a complicated component in any martial art. We all feel the need to succeed. To achieve goals. To get to the next level. They can be...excellent motivators. Or destroy someone if they obsess over it. Be patient and if you are only there for the belt, and find yourself not enjoying yourself, or the atmosphere, or the coach, move on. Find another gym, coach, or another martial art if you have to. It is *your* money, and more importantly, your **time**. We as coaches are here to help you, not the other way around.

Second, standards. Thankfully, the International BJJ Federation helped institute standards years back as the art of BJJ grew. They recognized a flaw in every other belt ranking martial art that came before it. Side note - colored belts as rank came from Judo. All other martial arts that use belts, took inspiration from this.

The IBJJF has rules in place for coaches that establish minimum times in rank. This prevents coaches from promoting students too quickly as we have seen in styles of martial arts, or schools that have '2 year Black Belt' programs. They sought to prevent these gimmicks from diluting the art and allowing amateur grapplers to diminish the success of those who truly earned their way into the higher ranks.

A healthy view to belts that I like to share is to – think of higher education. Some people get an Associates Degree. Others get a Bachelor's Degree. Fewer still earn a Master's Degree. And far far fewer earn a Doctorate Degree. All of them earned something and gained knowledge. Belts are the same. Fast tracking only causes problems.

# A BJJ Battleplan - Planning for Success



While belts are arbitrary by your gym/coach, your skills are entirely within your control. Golden Rule - coaches are only 15% of your success. You are the other 85%.

Next, we are going to discuss a BJJ Battleplan for you. A way for you to get solid skills as quickly as possible.

Absolutes - we cannot avoid the following factors: it takes - time, effort, hard work, sweat, tears, and grit. That does not mean you have to sit idly by and just *go with the flow*. Act!

In order to maximize our time, and progression, we will take a multi-pronged attack strategy. Each of these elements is important on their own. Combined they equal unbeatable tools of success:

1. **Alpha Element** - Know yourself! Know your reasons for doing this.

Focus on your strengths. As soon as possible, figure out your reasons for doing BJJ. Are you in it for a challenging sport? To compete? For self-defense skills? All of these are valid reasons, and perhaps you have something important that I did not list above.

This is important as it helps you to determine your path and the steps required to reach your goals. If you are in it for a hobby, a casual approach over the long haul, a laid back 'get there when I get there' approach, then skip ahead and ignore the remainder of these elements.

2. **Bravo Element** - Stay the Course - limit sidetracks/eye candy. In BJJ you will see a myriad of absolutely amazing, technically proficient, and outright masters of their craft. This is a powerful drug, and lures us into following these gladiators. To copy their moves, apply their stunts, pull off amazing tricks just like them.

While this serves as an excellent motivator, it can be a death knell for us to improve. We do not have to be dogmatic about it and never try these cool moves we see; afterall, it all helps get the creative juices flowing. If we are inspired by a move, we should pursue it to have fun and see the larger picture. We just have to know when to stop chasing ghosts.

The reality is, as White, Blue, and even early Purple Belts, we usually lack the tools, timing, coordination, and skill to pull off some of the high level techniques that capture our imagination. Spending all our time focused on these, retards our own progress. We are playing someone else's game, rather than building our own.

3. **Charlie Element** - Train Alone! BJJ class is all about partner training. It is the single biggest defining factor as to why BJJ became successful vs the other traditional martial arts that became less focused on partner training, and more focused on solo practice.



Partner training/sparring/rolling is the best in class. The gains can never be matched by solo training, but that does not mean solo practice does not have its place. Boxing has shadow boxing. Kung Fu, Karate, Tae Kwon Do, and even old Muay Thai and Judo, had forms/kata/taolu training. Moves done in the air.

Our ancestors recognized the value in practicing on our own to build fundamentals, movement patterns, coordination, nuance, and form habits. We should follow in their footsteps and use this to advance our skills at a faster pace.

BJJ fundamentals training, the movements you'll find in my 'Ground Fighting Basics' courses, are absolutely critical to our grappling skills. They are the movements our body needs to memorize. The things we can not waste precious brain power on when we are in the heat of battle. Training things like this on our own, will build those pathways in our body outside of class, so we can decrease the time it takes for us to learn to walk again on these new feet.

We don't need to do these movements forever, but it builds solid habits so later on down the road, when we have reached Brown, or Black Belt level, and we are trying to master a new transition, choke setup, sweep method, or arm bar precision, we have the habits in place for drilling that we learned and cemented as White, Blue, and Purple Belts.

4. **Delta Element** - Drill, or don't. After years of coaching, and observing my own habits, I finally came to the realization that each student is different when it comes to drilling. Some are wired for sitting and drilling the same thing over and over and over and over. Wayne Gretzky, the famous hockey player was wired this way. He could sit in front of a net and shoot pucks in a net for hours.

There are countless examples of athletes, musicians, artists succeeding with this approach. Drilling single independent pieces over and over and over. Despite boredom. However, if this were the only way to succeed, then the human race would have mastered the solution to learning anything.

Then we have the opposite - people like Eddie Van Halen, who couldn't read music, or explain chords. He couldn't break things down into music theory, or teach someone from a book. But he was one of the best rock and roll guitarists there was. He just played. Playing allows us to see the larger picture. To play the song. When a piece of the song sucks, we drill that. Like a surgeon, we hone in on the illness and target it with a solution. There is not one right way to get better at martial arts.

## It's an ART! It's all about YOU!

As with any of the great artists in history, they would train as apprentices for years under another great artist. The apprentice would copy the master's art with exquisite precision. Then, one day, usually with the blessing of the master, the apprentice was ready to venture forth on their own. To create their own art.

BJJ, or any martial art for that matter, is no different. When you begin - copy, copy, copy! Do what you are shown, as you are shown it, to the best of your ability. Eventually, around veteran Purple Belt level, you will begin to know your own art. You will gravitate to certain moves, prefer particular positions,

develop your own movement patterns, and have your own arsenal of submissions you use to attack your prey.

This is normal, and natural. We are not robots, nor are we carbon copies of one another. Unless you are an exact anatomical and mental match of your coach, you will never be capable of achieving what they have using the same moves, positions, techniques. You will need to adapt the art to your own size, shape, strength, flexibility, spirit (docile/passive, aggressive). This is the way. Try to *be* someone else, and you are doomed to fail. Be yourself. Create your art...when you have the skill to do so.

## It's NOT about YOU!

Now that we've established our end goal and a good perspective to achieve our own skill, we should discuss the other components to your training - your teammates, partners, practice friends. In martial arts we only get as good as those we train with. If we reach a higher competency in our teammates, and we selfishly keep all of our knowledge and do not help them get better – we stop growing.

We stagnate. Our skills peak and we remain stuck. “We have to give it away to keep it.” Meaning, if we do not help others, we forget things and they decay in our mind/body. Invest in your partners and you will achieve far more, and at a faster pace, than holding things close to the vest.

## What's the Point of BJJ?

The objective in the ground war can be simplified into the following:

- Achieve a dominant position on your opponent by takedown, sweep, or guard pass.
- Prevent the opponent from getting one of these dominant positions on you.
- Launch submission attacks on your opponent once you obtain a dominant position.
- Escape a bad position if the opponent secures one on you.
- Making and Breaking - Defensively, we want to *make* space. Offensively, we want to *take, or break* space from our opponent.

## BJJ Terminology

There are common terms in BJJ that you will hear as you begin your journey. This will help you quickly understand what each of these mean, and why they matter.

### What is a Submission

A submission is a choke, or joint lock/tear. By definition, a strike is a submission as well. Anything that breaks/damages your opponent, knocks them unconscious, or causes them to yield by ‘tapping out’.

Here is a list of most of the submissions you'll find in BJJ:

#### Chokes

Arm Triangle Choke

Ezekiel Choke

Leg Triangle Choke

Cross Collar Choke  
Dandelion Choke  
Loop Choke  
Lion Killer Choke, or RNC - Rear Naked Choke  
Bow & Arrow Choke  
Ax Handle Choke  
Underhook Choke  
Anaconda Choke  
Clock Choke  
Python Choke  
Necktie Choke  
Guillotine Choke

### **Locks**

Arm Bar  
Keylock - aka Americana  
Wrist/Finger Fold  
Hammerlock - aka Kimura  
Crucifix (both joint lock and choke)  
Violin  
Coil Lock - aka Omoplata  
Ankle Lock  
Knee Bar

## What are Sweeps?

Sweeps are essentially throws on the ground. Launched from a guard position (closed, open, etc). A way to flip an opponent up in the air and knock them over in order to gain an advantageous (dominant) position from which you can launch submissions.

There are many guards in BJJ, and each usually has their own sweep component. I recommend starting with 1 or 2 sweeps from the basic Closed/Open Guard position, and 1 or 2 vs a standing opponent.

### When to sweep

Sweeps are all about timing. If we're forcing a sweep, we're probably missing the signal, or trying to rush the sweep. Be patient, watch for when your opponent lifts their *base*.

The universal sweeps are as follows:

### **Vs Opponent on the Ground**

Scissor Sweep  
Elevator Sweep  
Pendulum Sweep

### **Vs Standing Opponent**

Waist Chop Sweep  
Sickle Sweep

Pincer Sweep  
Tripod Sweep

## The 4 Dominant Positions

BJJ can be broken down into 4 dominant/inferior positions (depending which side of it you are on), and variations thereof. The 4 dominant positions are:

**Mount**



**Side Mount - aka Side Control**



**Rear Mount**



**Guard - Open/Closed**



## The Unbreakable Rule! - Position Before Submission

One of the most recited phrases on the mats of any BJJ gym. Submissions should never be launched without first obtaining a position on the opponent. Once a position is established, then and only then can a submission be effectively launched. Otherwise, there is almost guaranteed failure in the attack.



## Escaping Bad Positions

One of the most powerful feelings you will experience in BJJ, is the first time you successfully escape one of the aforementioned positions. This is by far one of the most valuable tools BJJ has to offer. Submissions are amazing. Sweeps are stupendous. Escapes are where the magic lies.

### Why Escapes Tap Out Submissions

If we fail to escape a bad position, there is little need for submissions or sweeps. The reality is, when we are stuck underneath a larger and stronger opponent, who deftly passed our untrained guard, or brutishly smashed our legs out of the way and bent us into a pretzel, we need to know how to manage this position. Without escapes, the rest of BJJ has limited power.

## Where to Spend Your Time

My recommendation on time division in BJJ for the first 1 to 2 years:

Forgo the luring temptation of focusing solely on learning every choke, joint lock, and sweep. Instead, spend

- 30% of your time learning to escape from each inferior position (see above).
- 30% on passing guard. If you can't pass guard, you can't submit an opponent.
- 20% on stopping the guard pass. If you can't prevent an opponent from passing guard, you'll get plenty of opportunities to test your escapes.
- 10% on submissions. This is mainly laying the groundwork and coordination for later.
- 10% on sweeps. The same reason listed for submissions.

## Fundamentals...On Your Time

Training fundamentals as found in my Ground Fighting Basics I, II, and III, can be done on your time. The purpose of drilling these is the equivalent of learning to walk. We need these movement patterns to become second nature. Like any good drill, we train it until we get the skill, then we dump the drill. These drills are often included in the warm-ups phase of BJJ class depending on the gym. For myself, I prefer you work on these on your own time. Class time is precious. Partners are even more valuable. When we have the opportunity to train with another person, we maximize it rather than wasting that time on solo drills.

## START ROLLING

As soon as you are ready, you'll want to start rolling. Rolling is what we call sparring in BJJ. Some of us want to dive right into this phase, and that's great. But a little caution goes a long way. When we're new, we are going to rely on the only thing we know, which we'll discuss in a minute. The things we know are perceived by teammates to be a threat, and therefore they might reciprocate. Unfortunately, one of you is going to get hurt, and it is usually the new person.

Taking the first few classes to watch the rolling, and getting to know your partners is a valuable tool. You may find the gym you are in is training too rough for your liking. This is a good opportunity to seek out other places to train. There are many great gyms filled with amazing people that want to improve

themselves, and help you right alongside them. Find those people! The injuries in this art are too severe to screw around.

## Speed and Power

When we begin BJJ, we already know how to do two things - go fast, and go hard. In order to create the best possible learning conditions for our brain, we need to quickly remove these from the sparring practice. These are used later to test our skills and what we've learned.

Speed and power create stress. We do not learn very well under stress. We only reinforce what we already know. When constant in the sparring practice, it retards our growth and prevents us from seeing what is happening real time. Sure, we can roll 15 times going hard, going fast. Guaranteed we don't remember most of what went right, or wrong. Roll 3 rounds at a healthy pace, and go home remembering valuable things that occurred, so you know what to fix, or at least what questions to ask in your next class.

Bottomline - remove speed and power from the training process to help keep you and your partners safe. Use it for testing your skills. Competitions are perfect for this outlet.

## In Summary

I hope this helps you start your BJJ journey on a positive foot, with a solid understanding of what BJJ is, what you are trying to accomplish, and where to focus your energy and limited time when you start. Good luck and welcome to the mats!

Randy Brown  
Black Belt - Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu