

Six Step Process to Learning Martial Arts

by Bruce R. Bethers

The human activity of learning has over the decades been thoroughly analyzed by many Great Minds to include many noted Martial Artists.

One excellent example was Dr. Jigoro Kano, Founder of Kodokan Judo. He was also a very famous educator in Japanese Society. Many of the technical aspects and the resulting methods of teaching (as well as the taxonomy of techniques) of Kodokan Judo are a direct result of Dr. Kano's understanding of the "Steps" in the "Learning Process". Many Martial Arts Sensei have often pointed out that before you can defend yourself with appropriate techniques, you must first "know your Martial Art".

There are "Three Basic Truths" in learning a Martial Art:

1. You must know the techniques of your Art, before it will help you in self-defense.
 2. Speed will not help you if you don't know the techniques of your Art.
 3. Knowledge provides flexibility in handling the unexpected.
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1. **OBSERVATION:** A student of the Martial Arts must focus on all key essential elements of his or her Sensei's Teaching Points (Explanation & Demonstration). To begin trying a technique without careful observation will often cause mistakes or bad habits to form early in the learning process. These mistakes or bad habits can cause delay & possibly injury to the participants when careful observation is not included in learning the Martial Arts. It is noteworthy to mention that the student should watch for all aspects of an each technique, both what your sensei explains & what he or she may not explain. Certain elements of every technique, such as timing & distance are not easy to explain, but must be observed by the "watchful eye" of an astute & dedicated student.
 2. **PERSEVERANCE:** Any student of the Martial Arts must display a strong sense of perseverance in his or her studies. As your Sensei will surely tell you, it requires many steps to climb a mountain. The same is true in studying the Martial Arts. In most cases, there are specific paths or steps that must be followed. Learning a technique completely will generally mean taking the time to allow the knowledge & skill to "Soak In" and remember, everyone learns at different speeds.
 3. **TECHNICAL KNOWLEDGE:** Learning the Martial Arts requires having a Qualified Instructor. Students must take the time to "hear" what their Sensei is explaining so that they gain a complete understanding of each technique. This critical element is very important and cannot be "rushed" in the process. Learning the "why", "what" & "how" of each technique allows the student the opportunity to understand both the technical aspect as well as the philosophical foundation of the Martial Arts.
 4. **REPETITION:** This is where the "Rubber Meets The Road", so to speak. In order to properly learn most techniques of the Martial Arts (like all martial arts), expect to complete several thousand repetitions first, then continue to practice for life. You must master a technique to the level of "automatic

- reaction", if you expect to truly learn the Martial Arts. Remember, "Learning" is a "Way Of Life, or a Road To Travel", not an end or destination.
5. **EXPERIMENTATION:** After repetition, comes experimentation. Once you have gained the skill & confidence with a technique, it is important to experiment with various situations where the technique could be used in self-defense. Under the guidance of your Sensei, you should experiment with different variations & combinations of each technique of the Martial Arts to gain a greater depth of understanding & knowledge.
 6. **SELF-EVALUATION:** As a student of the Martial Arts, you will be evaluated by your Sensei on many aspects of your "Growth". The "Technical Aspect" of your training, although important, is only one aspect to your growth. As you learn and rise to the higher mudansha and yudansha levels, you will be expected to self-evaluate your attitude, technical skill, sincerity and representation of the Martial Arts. Questions like: "Is the technique practical for me?" "Does it work the same for people of different height or weight?" "What limits do I have?" "Can I demonstrate & teach the technique properly?" etc.

Note: Each step in the "Process" is connected and each step leads to the next level. Learning the Martial Arts is a Life-Long Adventure which can create much personal satisfaction & provide the foundation for perfecting human character.

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