

# Five Action Techniques

*By Dave J. Lomas*

All the martial arts, with a few exceptions, are based on five basic actions or techniques that are the centre points to all the fighting styles. These five action techniques are striking, (punching), kicking, blocking, throwing, (or take down methods), and controlling, (arm locks and restraining holds). These five basic actions are the very nature of the fighting arts with more focus placed on one or more items over the others depending on the nature or structure of the fighting style in question. In the case of the Korean fighting arts like tae kwon do or tangsoodo the kick is the most important and most emphasized technique of the five basic actions while in the case of the Japanese martial art of judo the main item of focus is of course the judo throw or take down method. In the case of aikido it would be throwing techniques using arm and wrist locks while in the case of European boxing it would be hand strikes. Shaolin china, known as the seizing arts, would use lock and restrain methods in much the same way as aikido.

Anyone who was around back in the early 1970's will remember that until kung fu became very popular the fighting arts of karate and judo, although widespread, was not that well understood by the general public and many thought that in the case of karate the main form of striking was with the edge of the hand, this being of course the famous karate chop, and many thought that apart from breaking bricks with the hand and the odd kick here and there, that was all there was to it. Today of course people are far more aware of how karate works and other fighting arts like judo.

In the 1960's the standard belief was that to use a kick when fighting was not only unfair but also cowardly and was a no-go thing to do, today however attitudes towards kicking is readily acceptable. When kung fu hit the big screen and television in the 1970's, the public for the first time on a large scale began to realise that fighting using kicks was in some ways the main method of fighting in the martial arts. Who would have thought that the humble kick could be used in such a devastating and spectacular way? For the first time ever on such a large scale the public was made aware that fighting involved not only dynamic high kicking methods but also advanced forms of fighting and an in-depth tradition that had never been truly seen before. This in many ways made people realise for the first time that fighting was not limited to just punching each other, as in boxing, but also offered the man in the street the chance to learn how to fight, be it for competition or practical self-defence, without having to be built like a tank or super strong in the first place.

Many advertisements promoting new beginners classes would do so by showing a person in a high kicking pose and the promise of learning what some would say or claim as the very best or ultimate in fighting. In many cases the use of high kicks in films and within advertisements was to become the trademark of the fighting arts. Today after many years the effectiveness of kicks, although still a vital part of the martial arts, is no

longer the main focus within many fighting styles with the exception of those like tae kwon do that focus and specialise in kicking techniques.

As kicks have always been portrayed as the most glamorous of the five main parts of the martial arts we shall look at this item a bit more closely first. Keeping in mind that the names and descriptive terms vary from style to style and are pronounced in different ways depending on which country it originally comes from, the following terms and names used are describing techniques that are common within most fighting styles.

The kick can only be used in a limited number of ways compared to hand striking methods and of these kicks the most common used are the Front Kick, which is self descriptive, the Side Kick, the Back Kick, the Hook Kick and the circular motion kicks like the Axe Kick. The simplest and most effective kick of them all, and also the easiest to learn, is the Front Kick. This kick is thrown in a forward direction using a thrusting or a snap and fast recoil action using the ball of the foot as the impact area. The kick can be targeted at the opponents head, body, groin or legs and takes only a scant few seconds to perform. This type of kick is one of the easiest ways of kicking someone because it is less difficult to master and requires less flexibility in the kicking legs; additionally the Front Kick offers a better chance of you recovering your balance after it has been used.

Although the Front Kick is in many ways one of the most practical of all the kicking methods it is the Side Kick that has gained more recognition and fame above all others. The Side Kick, which yet again is very much self descriptive, involves simply kicking in a side-on position or as the name states kicking to the side. This is without question the most famous of all the kicks in the martial arts and offers, as with all the various kicks, the advantage of being more powerful than a punch, (legs are stronger than arms or hands), and has a more longer better reaching way of striking someone. Although the Side Kick is something of a trademark for the many fighting styles, and of course very effective and powerful, more so when the kick is aimed at the head of your opponent, this type of kick is without question one of the most difficult and hard to master for those who lack flexibility in the legs therefore many clubs' teaching the martial arts that involve the use of kicks, such as tae kwon do, will spend a large amount of time on stretching exercises specifically for the purpose of developing the required flexibility needed for this type of kick.

Unless the practitioner of the fighting arts is very good at high kicking methods it is best to avoid it because of the problem of putting yourself at risk against counter strikes due to the time required to recover your balance from this type of kick. Recovering your balance after kicking is vital when every second counts in a life or death situation. With the Front Kick it is easy to return your foot back down to the ground and regain your much needed balance. A Front Kick, if performed by an expert, can be thrown and then returned to the ground in around 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of a second. In addition to the front and the Side Kick the other remaining methods of kicking are the back or Spinning Back Kick, the hook or roundhouse kick and the axe or circular motion kicks. Although there are a fair few variations to these kicks these are the main used methods of kicking within any martial art style.

Hand fighting techniques are without question the widest ranging of all the fighting methods available to the martial artist with blocking methods on an equal footing. Unlike kicks which have the advantage of being the long range way of striking, hand striking techniques are somewhat limited to medium and short range methods of fighting, but what hand techniques lack in striking range they amply make up for when it comes to their variety and speed. Fighting at close or medium range requires the use of good hand and eye co-ordination and fast reflex skills along with the need to strike, in many cases, at high speed. Although there are a great number of ways to strike and punch the main basic items that are common to all forms of fighting is the lunge or Thrust Punch. These types of punches can be thrown from a high shoulder position or, in the case of traditional martial arts, from the hip with a corkscrew turn of the fist on impact. This type of punch is used when stepping forward to close the gap between yourself and your opponent, in one of several ways, and often involves putting a degree of body weight behind the strike to enhance the technique. This type of striking method is normally taught at very basic level and is also used as part of blocking practice against this strike with a partner. Performed normally at high speed this is very much a medium range method of striking that is used in the main in what we call an attack mode.

Opposite to this leading hand form of attack is the Reverse Punch which as its name suggests is a punch thrown opposite to the leading leg or if you refer in reverse position. The lunging or thrusting punch is always thrown on the same side, meaning that if the left foot/leg is in the forward position then the left hand is used to make the strike. In the case of a Reverse Punch if the left leg is in the forward position then the right hand is used. The Reverse Punch is one of the most common of all the striking methods within the martial arts and can be performed with full focus, meaning to lock the punching arm on impact or with a fast recoil action in a snapping way. Many would regard the Reverse Punch as a medium range method of striking but unless the legs are used to close the gap between you and the target that you are attempting to hit the Reverse Punch remains a short range fighting technique. What makes the Reverse Punch so common with all the various fighting styles is that apart from being something of a natural way of punching in comparison to other striking methods the Reverse Punch can be used for both attack and counter strike.

Although the thrusting and Reverse Punch methods are the most common and most often used there are also other forms of attacking or counter striking with the hands that are just as equally effective. There are various parts of the hand, in just the same way as the feet, that can be used to deliver a strike, this would include the use of the back of the hand or fist. The Back Fist technique, which is normally used against the side or front of a person's head in the main, is thrown in a whip like action and recoiled back in one smooth movement. This form of strike does not require the need to lock or focus the strike with any force like the basic lunging or Reverse Punch but gains its power from the sheer speed of the blow. The fast jab which is also common to many of the fighting arts is very much the same as the Back Fist technique for its very fast whip like action.

Many of the basic or more common used hand strikes and punches are performed by throwing the punch from the hip or side area of the body however in the case of very

close range fighting methods the situation will, in many cases, not allow for long arm movements as being in a close range fighting situation, time will be vital when getting a strike out.

One of the most practical of all the striking techniques when in a close combat situation is the straight line or centre punch. Called by various names the centre punch starts not from the hip but from the centre of the chest area and is thrown over a very short distance to the opponents face or maybe the body area.

The Straight Line Punch gains its power in the same way as a Back Fist or jab by the sheer speed of the blow and if performed by an expert the punch can be thrown in around one sixth of a second. This type of punch which uses the full focus or arm locking method, unlike a recoil jab technique, is not only very effective but also one of the fastest punches available in the martial arts. Many refer to this punching technique as a 'snap and jolting' punch and it is very hard to stop or defend against. There are many variations to the basic methods of striking or punching with the hands many of which can involve the use of the edge, palm, and wrist or back of the hand in some way. The available number of hand striking techniques can also include wild strikes which simply means lashing out with a hand strike that is performed in a wild or uncontrolled none technical manner.

The third of the five basic actions to be found within the martial arts is the ability to defend against strikes using what are commonly called blocks. Blocking an opponent's punch or kick is without question one of the most important aspects of martial art training and in a street fight it can make the difference between life and death.

The block can be used in one of two ways the most common of which is the method of deflecting an attackers strike or kick. This method of defence simply involves knocking away a striking fist or kick using the hand or arm in some way. The second method of defence against a strike is to redirect or push the attackers strike away in a form of controlling manner. There are at least twenty or more ways of blocking against various forms of attack including not only kicks and punches but also against being grabbed or strangled. Although there are many ways of blocking an opponent's attack including the use of forearm blocks, Cranes Wing, palm blocking and sweeping hands, (note that the names for the various blocks do vary depending on which school or style of martial art you practice), all of these various blocking methods are simply variations of just a few standard methods of defence.

Blocking techniques is the one area of martial art training that normally requires more time and practice than many people would realise as it is harder to master than many first think.

Learning the many and various forms of blocking can be a bit confusing for the new beginner as it requires learning to coordinate the moves that can be a bit hard to follow at first. Having learned these various blocking methods the true difficulty is then to put them into practice against an opponent.

Unlike throwing a punch or a kick, which of course is hard to do in itself, the problem of defensive blocking is that you need to be able to stop the many various forms of striking using not only good reflexes, speed, strength and co-ordination but also the ability to react to unpredictable moves and strikes, which may come in several different ways, rapidly one after another in a practical and fluid way. Many beginners to the martial arts having seen the spectacular kicks and punches portrayed in the blockbuster movies fail to realise that blocking techniques are in fact more vital than just being able to kick high.

Sparring with an opponent for the first few times within lessons you can often see the new beginner, especially children, attacking with the more glamorous of the striking techniques such as the famous flying Side Kick or Spinning Back Kick but with no thought at all to their own safety against kicks and strikes being thrown at them. Although in competition events the use of the many blocking methods is not required to a great degree as the main aim is to score the winning point or some form of knockout, the ability to defend however against your opponents' strikes in a street fight is vital. The most important thing to remember in any real street fight situation is that no matter how good your kicks or punches are, if you cannot stop a damaging kick or strike with good effective blocking methods then you will be very quickly hit and hurt which in turn means that you will be unable to continue to fight and could end up losing your life.

The throw or take down method of fighting is used in many of the martial arts with only a few exceptions and of all the various fighting styles available the Japanese art of judo is the most famous of them all for their often spectacular throwing techniques and is closely followed by the Japanese art of aikido. Judo focuses on the use of throwing methods by using the body to unbalance the opponent in some way for the specific purpose of getting them to the ground. The judo throw and other forms of tripping and grappling is the trademark of this style of fighting. Japanese aikido and the Chinese martial art of chin-na also places a great deal of focus on the use of throwing methods rather than kicking or punching but the basic difference between a throw and a takedown method is in how the opponent is taken down to the ground.

In the case of judo which uses body throwing and tripping methods the term throw is used a lot as they tend to throw their opponent over their shoulder or hip in an effort to get them to the ground. In the case of aikido and chin-na which also uses various methods of throwing their opponent to the ground the term take down would be more accurate. The term take down would be more suitable to describe aikido and chin-na as they use arm and wrist locks and holds to control and take a person to the ground instead of throwing their opponent using body actions. Many martial arts include take down methods within their training in various ways.

An example of a takedown method would be to sweep the leg from under your opponent in one of several ways or to apply a form of arm lock to take them down to the ground. In many cases the use of both throwing and take down techniques are used in an intermixed way and in some cases both terms could equally be used to describe a specific action.

Although some forms of take down or throwing methods can result in damaging the attacker and therefore preventing them from attacking you again the one basic problem is what to do when you have gained control of your opponent on the ground. In the case of competition events you would of course allow your opponent to get up again having scored the winning point but if this method of defence was used in a real street fight then as with all forms of fighting the option of using kicks and strikes should be considered.

Last but far from least is the control method of fighting. To control someone in a fighting situation, be it for sport competition or practical self-defence, can be done in one of two ways. The most common way to control someone is to apply a form of restraining arm or wrist lock or to hold them in a way that prevents them from moving or fighting back. This form of control can also include holding them down on the ground in a stranglehold position or even for that matter by just getting on top of them. The other method of controlling someone in a fighting situation is the method known as 'trapping'. Used in the striking arts, mainly close combat styles, this simply involves controlling your opponent's hands and arms to prevent them from striking you.

A classic example of how this would work would be to use your one hand to push or hold your attackers striking hand against their own chest or general body area for just a few scant moments so they cannot strike you with that hand and at the same time strike with your other hand. This form of fighting is called 'Trap and Enter', or control and strike back, and is used very effectively when in a close range combat situation. The trap and enter technique is an ideal first stage way of controlling someone before moving into some form of arm or wrist lock method.

A further example of controlling someone would be to first use a block to prevent being hit and then turn the action of blocking into a controlling arm lock of some kind. The arm lock by its very nature would control the person's actions and ability to fight effectively if only for a few short moments. These five modes of action are the very basis of the fighting arts regardless of style or origin and when combined together becomes very effective.

It should also be noted at this stage that certain techniques or fighting methods have been referred to on more than one occasion, but this was done purposely to help highlight the fact that all the various areas of combat are interlinked in many different ways which many fail to notice within their initial stages of training.

Based on self-defence and not on a competitive sport combat situation the following example is to give you a basic idea as to how you would respond to an attacker using what we would term self-defence methods that involves all the five action modes of the martial arts.

Imagine the situation of being in the street and someone approaches you and attempts to hit you in some way. As they move forward you move back to avoid being hit and then using your arm to stop or deflect the attackers punch, (the block), you then throw a counter strike to their body area with your foot, (the kick), and then taking their arm in a lock, (the control), you then swiftly use a sweep like action with your foot to

their leading leg, (the take down), which unbalances them and makes them fall to the ground. To conclude this physical conflict you would then use a hand strike, (the punch), to finish them off. In a matter of only a few short seconds you have blocked the punch, kicked them, controlled them with an arm lock and thrown them to the floor by using a takedown method and then ended the fight with a punch of your own.

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