

GET A HEAD START ON YOUR  
JIU JITSU JOURNEY

# THE BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO BJJ



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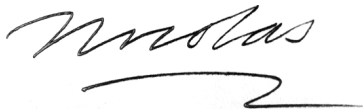
# 1. INTRODUCTION

Congratulations on beginning your Jiu Jitsu journey, by becoming a Jiu Jitsuka you have made a major step in the future of your own personal self-development and have embarked on an exciting and challenging journey.

The process of learning Brazilian Jiu Jitsu can be frustrating and difficult in the early stages the experience can be overwhelming. It has been estimated that for every 1000 people that start it only 5 or so continue and make it to the black belt. Too many people quit in the early stages because of the complexity and overwhelming number of techniques that they are presented with.

This beginners guide is designed to help you understand your chosen art and how to get the most out of your training. Jiu Jitsu can be challenging and, at times, even daunting, but with the challenges it presents comes great rewards. You can expect improvements in your overall health, character and self-esteem whilst making strong friendships with your training partners and having fun.

I hope that this guide will help you to understand some of the principals and philosophies of Jiu Jitsu and to gain greater knowledge of the types of training and practices that you will experience.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nicolas', with a long, sweeping underline stroke.

Nicolas Gregoriades

## 2. THE JIU JITSU BROTHERHOOD MOVEMENT

As a Jiu Jitsoka you are a part of something special. You're in an elite group of people who challenge themselves physically and mentally in ways most people can't even imagine. If you use Jiu Jitsu as a tool to help you understand yourself, to face your fears and to progress as a human being, then you are already a part of the Jiu Jitsu Brotherhood.

The Jiu Jitsu Brotherhood is a dojo without walls and without limits. It is a global community of Jiu Jitsu practitioners who are united by a desire to share and learn by transcending the inherent limits of the 'my school / team is best' mentality. It was formed to help people remember that the art is about uniting people, not dividing them. Jiu Jitsu Brotherhood is a way of thinking – a way to approach our your training and competing in a way that helps your growth and the growth of your fellow martial artists. We offer our own insights about the journey. We are not claiming that we have found 'the truth', only that we have found 'our truths'.

All the things Jiu Jitsu has given us; the friends we have made, the confidence we have gained and the self-knowledge we have acquired – we want all martial artists to experience and share these things. Jiu Jitsu is not something that should be restricted on the basis of race, nationality, athletic ability or chosen team. It was made for you.

**You are the Jiu Jitsu Brotherhood!**

## 3. THE HISTORY OF BRAZILIAN JIU-JITSU

It is important to understand the history of the art and how it arrived at where it is today.

### Japanese Jiu Jitsu

The origins of the art can be traced to the Buddhist monks of India. Some would argue that its history is even older, and that it originated with the pankration events of ancient Greece. But for our purposes, Jiu Jitsu (sometimes referred to as ju-jitsu) in its modern form derives from the battlefield art of the Samurai of Japan.

These samurai warriors were well-armoured and usually on horseback and the art of Jiu Jitsu was essentially developed to allow them to fight effectively in the event that they found themselves disarmed and on foot.

Because of the restricted mobility and agility associated with fighting in armour, Jiu Jitsu evolved to include throwing, joint-locks and strangles in addition to striking moves found in other martial arts.

### Judo

By the mid-1800's Jiu Jitsu had fractured into several styles or 'ryu'. Although the techniques varied from style to style, generally they all incorporated most aspects of hand to hand combat including strikes, grappling and weapon-based attacks and disarms.

In the 1880's, a standout young jiu Jitsuka, Jigoro Kano, developed his own ryu which was based around 'randori', or full-power practice against resisting and skilled opponents. This was a complete deviation from the partner practice that was prevalent at the time. Kano's style later evolved into Judo, which has become one of the most widely practiced sports in the world.

## **Mitsuyo Maeda and the Gracie Family**

In 1914 one of Kano's most famous students, Mitsuyo Maeda, emigrated from Japan to Brazil to help set up a Japanese colony there. Maeda became close friends with a local political figure called Gastao Gracie. Gastao used his political influence to help Maeda and the Japanese colony and in exchange Maeda taught Gastao's son Carlos the art of Jiu Jitsu.

Carlos Gracie trained with Maeda from the age of 15 until he was 21 when he returned to Japan. Carlos continued to train and develop the art after his departure and later taught the art to his younger brother Helio. Together they opened the first Brazilian Jiu Jitsu academy in 1925.

Over the years, the Gracies (notably Carlos and Helio) and their students refined their art through brutal no-rules fights, both in public challenge matches and on the street. They focused their attention on submission ground fighting, which allowed a smaller man to defend against and ultimately defeat a larger attacker.

In the 1970's Rolls Gracie began to further refine the art, incorporating, among other things, moves from wrestling into the curriculum. Alongside this he devised the first point and rule systems for Jiu Jitsu specific competition.





*Mitsuyo Maeda is considered to be the founding father of Brazilian Jiu Jitsu.*

## **The Ultimate Fighting Championship**

In the early 1990's another Gracie, Rorion, moved from Brazil to Los Angeles, hoping to showcase his family's fighting system to America.

Although no-rules, mixed martial arts contests (known as "Vale Tudo") had been popular in Brazil since Carlos Gracie first opened his academy in 1925, they were largely unknown in the rest of the world. Rorion and Art Davie conceived of an event called 'The Ultimate Fighting Championship' (UFC), which would pit various martial arts styles against each other. The UFC enabled challengers from various martial disciplines to battle each other in an effort to prove the credibility of their sport and illustrate their martial art as the best.

The first UFC took place in 1993 and was completely dominated by Rorion's younger brother Royce. Royce was not a big man, and was outweighed by the other competitors. In spite of this, he exploited the other contestants' naivety of ground fighting and emerged victorious, defeating three opponents in a single night. His wins led to a huge interest in Brazilian Jiu Jitsu, particularly in the USA and Japan, consolidating the sport's status as a truly global martial art.

## **The Modern Era**

Today, Brazilian Jiu Jitsu is riding the wave of the 'Mixed Martial Arts' (MMA) explosion, and is the fastest growing martial art in the world. There are now thousands of Jiu Jitsu academies spread across every corner of the globe.

Sport Jiu Jitsu has also grown massively in popularity. There is an established governing body, the International Brazilian Jiu Jitsu Federation (IBJJF), which runs a yearly, global competition circuit that attracts thousands of entrants.

Staying true to its roots, Jiu Jitsu continues to be effectively utilized in MMA competition - all fighters, regardless of their specialty, require at least a working knowledge of Jiu Jitsu to stand any chance of success.

The art is constantly evolving and being refined by its practitioners. New moves and techniques are being invented every day - a testament to the dynamic and 'live' nature of the art.

## 4. EQUIPMENT

Before embarking on your Jiu Jitsu journey there are several items of equipment that you will require. Some of these items are essential and some are not. Choosing exactly what you will need when you start can be very personal to the individual.

A wide variety of Jiu Jitsu equipment can be found at the Jiu Jitsu Brotherhood online store here: [www.jjbgear.com](http://www.jjbgear.com).

Here are some tips and advice on what to get:

### **The Gi – a Jiu Jitsu Fighter’s Armour**

Most jiu-jitsu training is practiced in a uniform called a ‘Gi’ or as the Brazilians call it, a ‘Kimono’. The word ‘Gi’ is derived from the Japanese words ‘keikogi’ or ‘dogi’, which means “uniform for training”. Buying your first Gi can be a daunting process. There are many combinations of brands, cuts, weaves and colors to choose from.

Sizing is generally the same between most manufacturers, but the cut is not. Different brands have different levels of taper around the shoulders and back. Remember, that unless it has been pre-shrunk, your Gi will get a lot tighter after the first hot wash, so keep this in mind when choosing the size. The Gi should be a little baggy when you try it on, because it will drop and shrink a couple of inches in every direction after you wash it (in many cases even if it has been pre-shrunk).

The thickness of the cloth is referred to as the weave and there are several different weaves to choose from. The heavier the weave and the thicker the lapels, the more difficult it will be for you opponent to grip you, and the longer the suit will last. However, the drawbacks are that if you are in a warm climate, the

suit will become very hot and heavy as it becomes drenched with perspiration. It will also take longer to dry after washing.

There is an increasing trend towards 'super-light' or honeycomb woven Gis. These may look and feel cool to wear, but keep in mind what they were designed for - fighters entering competition who want to make weight. If you choose this as your standard training Kimono it's unlikely that it will last very long.

I would suggest that you do not try to use a judo suit for Jiu Jitsu. Jiu Jitsu Gis have tighter cuffs on the trousers and sleeves. This allows the practitioner to benefit from a closer fit, providing less material for an opponent to manipulate.

## **The Belt**

The Brazilian Jiu Jitsu belt does more than simply hold your Gi jacket in place, it also represents your rank and level of knowledge. Each belt will remain with you for long periods of time and if you choose to buy one it is worth investing in a high quality heavyweight belt that will last the duration.

At the start of your journey you will have to wear the white belt, and most Gis do not come with a belt included so this will need to be purchased separately. Most academies award stripes to denote progress through each belt and therefore your belt should have a black bar at one end to hold these stripes. Generally the belt should be the same size that you chose for your Gi and should be long enough to wrap around your waist twice and still have a little excess length once tied.

## **Rash Guards**

Rash Guards can be worn for both Gi and no-Gi training. When training in the Gi the use of a Rash Guard helps to both draw

moisture away from your body and also to prevent skin burns caused by contact with the rough Gi material. Rash Guards also help to limit the spread of skin infections, such as ringworm and Staph.

T-shirts are acceptable for no-gi training, but Rash Guards are far superior. They don't tear as easily, and they don't permanently stretch and get caught in your opponent's limbs.

## Grappling Shorts

Grappling shorts, or 'Fight Shorts', are essential for no-Gi training. 'Sprawl', the original fight-short company, started a trend with designer fight shorts catering specifically to grapplers and there are now many options available on the market. They tend to be better than standard board shorts because they are designed to offer flex in the correct areas, but if you can't afford them I have found that most board shorts function perfectly as fight shorts. Just make sure that you don't get ones with baggy pockets, which might cause difficulties when training and which are also banned in competition.

## Protective Equipment

Protective equipment is not essential for Brazilian Jiu Jitsu but it is worth remembering that it is a contact sport and, on occasion, injuries can occur. You may wish to consider investing in some of the following to help avoid injuries:

- Gum Shield

There is always a chance of getting accidentally struck in the mouth whilst training and this has happened to me on many occasions. It is worth considering wearing

one to avoid dental damage. A number of options exist, but is possible I would recommend one that has been professionally molded by dentist. Otherwise the inexpensive boil-and bite ones will do fine.

- Groin Protector

I no longer wear a groin protector. I find that they just get in the way. I also found that they promoted poor technique when doing armbars and kneebars. They are illegal in competition too, so you probably shouldn't get in the habit of wearing them.

- Ear Guards

I used to wear these but ultimately found that they were more hassle than they were worth, and I decided I could live with cauliflower ears. If this is not an option for you and you are going to get some, I would recommend the Asics brand of wrestling ear-guards. Make sure you wash them frequently because they reek after a few heavy training sessions.

- Knee Pads

Although these are a bit of a nuisance to get on, and require frequent washing, they will save a lot of wear and tear on your knees. I haven't seen a Jiu Jitsu specific pair on the market, but in the meanwhile I use the Nike Volleyball ones.

## 5. CHOOSING AN ACADEMY

Over the past decade or so Jiu Jitsu has grown in popularity tremendously. More and more people are trying it out and becoming students and as the number of students has grown, so has the number of academies and classes to choose from. Choosing a place to train is a very important decision and can there are several factors to consider when make your decision, including the following:

### **The Instructor(s)**

The most important aspect of any academy is the instructor. It has been my experience that the best Jiu Jitsu instructors are friendly, easy going and humble. They smile a lot and treat their students with honesty and respect.

Be wary of anybody who badmouths his competitors or claims to be the best for whatever reason. If someone has truly been practicing Jiu Jitsu for a long time they should be humble about their skills. If your instructor is a legitimate black belt, he will be clear and open about the lineage of his grade.

### **The Students**

I have found that, more often than not, the students are a reflection of the instructor and visa versa. Happy, friendly students usually have happy, friendly instructors. Bullying, arrogant instructors have similar students.

## **Level of Professionalism**

Although BJJ is a pretty laid back martial art, you should still expect high levels of professionalism from the academy you choose. Classes should start on time.

## **Cleanliness**

Jiu Jitsu is a contact sport that requires close contact with your training partners. In a busy academy, the mats should be cleaned and disinfected often, preferably once per day. Students should be encouraged to wear clean uniforms and to cut their nails regularly. If an academy has a poor level of hygiene then skin infections, such as Staph, can occur.



## 6. BJJ FOR SELF-DEFENCE

With an increased emphasis on competition and sports Jiu Jitsu techniques in many academies over recent years, it can be easy to lose sight of the importance of learning techniques that are effective for self-defence purposes.

When the legendary Rickson Gracie was recently asked for his thoughts on the future of Jiu Jitsu, he replied: “I see a need for a revolutionary process for Jiu Jitsu, a return to its essence as a style of self-defence. I want to bring back that concept of effectiveness rather than advantage points and little stalling positions.”

Not everyone that starts training in BJJ intends to compete and it is very important that all BJJ beginners have the opportunity to be exposed to a variety of techniques that are effective in self-defence situations. Most people agree that strong fundamentals are more effective than competition style techniques for self-defence and that 50/50 guard and berimbolos would have limited value in a street fight.

Whilst most fights end up on the ground eventually, all fights start standing and one of the most important skills for a grappler to have is the ability to close the distance and take the fight to the ground. Being able to have an understanding of how to evade strikes, clinch and perform takedowns is just as important as learning the latest inverted triangle from tornado guard.

Here is an example of a commonly taught BJJ style defence against the standing side headlock:

1. I have been caught in a side headlock with my opponents right arm wrapped around my head and neck with his hands locked together. My right hand grabs hold of his wrist to release the pressure on my neck. My left hand reaches around to grab his bicep on the opposite side to reduce his ability to punch me:



2. If my opponent unlocks his hands and attempts to punch me, the pressure on my neck will be released and I can defend my face with my open right hand:



3. My leg that is behind my opponent will now straighten out and I will sit back onto the floor:





4. As I sit back I roll onto my opponent and gain top position. From here I cross-face my opponent and posture upwards breaking his headlock control:



5. I now have the option to either attack from side control, stand up and strike my opponent, or escape:



# 7. THE FUNDAMENTAL POSITIONS

There are numerous different positions which you will be exposed to during your BJJ training, but in my opinion the following seven positions are the most fundamentally important for beginners to master an understanding of:

1. Standing
2. Guard
3. Side Mount
4. Knee on chest
5. Full mount
6. Back mount
7. Turtle

## 1. STANDING

The standing position is often overlooked in the early stages of BJJ training, but it is very important to have an understanding of the position as all fights ultimately start in this position both in competition and self-defence situations.

There are several key principles that can be used to make your stand-up game better.

The best starting posture is not too upright or too bent over, with your hands protecting your lapels, to prevent your opponent easily taking grips, and your lead leg to prevent your opponent shooting in for a takedown.



*The best starting posture is not too upright or too bent over.*

Your centre of gravity, which is located about 2 cm below your belly button, is key to your success with stand-up techniques. As a general principle your balance becomes worse as your centre of gravity becomes higher and conversely the lower your centre of gravity is the more stable you will become.

Another important aspect of the stand-up game is to avoid crossing your feet. If your feet become in-line with each other or cross your balance will become compromised and you will be far easier to take down. Whilst moving around you should attempt to do so without crossing your feet.



*It is important to avoid crossing your feet when fighting from the stand-up position.*

Grip fighting is a vital aspect of the stand-up game. The person that dominates the grip fighting will dominate the fight. You should be attempting to set your grips, whilst not allowing your opponent to set his. If he does get grips then you should break them as quickly as possible.



*Grip fighting is a vital aspect of the stand-up game.*



## 2. GUARD

Guard is the most commonly encountered position, and is by far the most complex and difficult to master of the fundamental positions. Guard refers to any of the positions in which you are beneath your opponent on your back and are using your legs to control him by wrapping them around his torso or one of his legs.

There are three main variations of guard:

- a. Closed guard
- b. Open guard
- c. Half guard

### a. Closed guard

In closed guard the bottom grappler has their legs wrapped around the torso of their opponent with the ankles closed together. This gives the bottom grappler a degree of control over the opponent's balance and the ability to move him forwards, backwards and from side to side. Closed guard is the most commonly employed position by most BJJ beginners.

It is the safest form of guard and therefore the most difficult to pass. There are numerous sweeps and attacking options available from the closed guard and many of the sweeps result in the opponent being reversed into the dominant full mount position.



*In closed guard the bottom grappler has their legs wrapped around the torso of their opponent with the ankles closed together.*

When attacking from the closed guard, try to break your opponent's posture by pulling his head down close to your chest, as it is much easier to attack from this position. Avoid opening your guard without first setting your grips and having a plan of attack in mind. Try to drag your opponent's arm across his centerline as this sets up many submissions, sweeps and back-takes. It is much better to have your hips angled than square on when attacking from the closed guard as it gives you more opportunities to attack and will also make it more difficult for your opponent to stand up and pass your guard.



*Keeping your hips angled as opposed to square on the mat creates many attacking options.*

The main objective of the top grappler is to free themselves from their opponents legs and move into to a control position by ‘passing the guard’. There are many guard passes and I will discuss the standing guard pass in the ‘Top Tips for Beginners’ chapter a little later in this book.

When caught within your opponent’s guard, try to maintain good posture by keeping your head up. It is also important to avoid over-extending your arms and gifting your opponent an armlock.

## **b. Open guard**

The open guard is perhaps the most complex of all the positions in Jiu Jitsu. In the open guard the legs are not closed together around your opponents torso. Within it, there are countless permutations, including De La Riva guard, butterfly-guard, X-guard, Z-guard,

tornado-guard, worm-guard, Spider-guard etc etc. There are many new variations being developed all the time.



*In the open guard the legs are not closed together around your opponents torso.*

Open guard tends to be a more dynamic and faster paced position than closed guard and as a result there are far more opportunities to sweep than from closed guard.

When attacking from the closed guard make sure your feet and legs are working for you, they should never be on the floor, but instead pushing or pulling your opponent behind his knees, on his hips or against his shoulders and biceps. You should be constantly striving to break down your opponents posture and should never let your opponent have grips on both of your legs.

It is generally easier for the top grappler to pass the guard because it is already open. When attempting to pass the open guard try to get grips on your opponent's legs, especially the inside of his knees, as this will make it easier move them out the way and pass. There are also opportunities available to submit the opponent using foot and leg attacks such as the straight foot lock.



*It is easier to pass the open guard if you set your grips on the inside of your opponent's knees.*

### **c. Half guard**

The half guard has become very popular over the past decade. In fact, some schools build their whole system off the half guard. In the half guard one of the top grappler's legs is controlled by the bottom grappler's legs. As with the other guard variations there are numerous sweeps, submissions and back-takes available from half guard.

Any attack from half guard begins with the control of your opponent's knee and pelvis with your legs. It is also very important to never be flat on your back, instead try to stay on your side and shoulder. As a general rule, keep one of your shoulders off the ground as you have no leverage when your upper back is flattened out. Create a frame with your forearms to prevent your opponent driving forwards and putting their weight on you.



*When attacking from half guard try to create a frame with your forearms to prevent your opponent from driving forwards into you.*

The worse thing that can happen is for your opponent to get control of your head. This will allow your opponent to flatten you out and make it very difficult for you to escape. A good tip to avoid this is to use your palm to shield your face and create space to escape.



*Defend against head control at all costs, using your palm to face shield if need be.*

Conversely when you are on top of someone in their half guard you should try to flatten your opponent onto his back and make sure he's looking away from you by controlling his head. Unlike the other guard variations there are more submissions available to the top grappler and it is not uncommon to see collar chokes and figure four armlocks successfully implemented from inside the half guard.

### 3. SIDE MOUNT

In side mount the top grappler is perpendicular to their opponent, with their weight applied to the opponent's chest. It is usually the beginner's choice of dominant positions because it is quite stable and reasonably easy to hold an opponent. It is a very stable and versatile position and its many variations allow you to adjust to your opponent's movements easily.



*In side mount the top grappler is perpendicular to their opponent, with their weight applied to the opponent's chest.*

There are a wide variety of submissions available to the top grappler from side control and it is also possible to improve position by moving to mount, back mount or the knee on chest positions. When controlling your opponent from side mount try to keep your centre of gravity as low as possible. If you can keep both of your opponent's shoulders pinned to the mat, i.e. not allowing him to turn in towards you or out away from you, it will be very difficult for him to escape. Also try to keep your legs and feet away from your opponent's legs and feet. This will help prevent you from being pulled back into his guard.

When defending from underneath side mount your primary objective is to escape to a safer position. Many beginners tell me that the most difficult place that they find to deal with and escape from is being underneath side mount.

It is very important to never allow your opponent to gain control of your head, as it is very difficult to move your body if that happens. Try to keep your elbows and forearms between your torso and your opponent's torso. This will provide a base from which you can



start to push him away and create space. Bridging explosively and creating large angles when you snake will make your side mount escapes more likely to be successful.



*It is very important to never allow your opponent to gain control of your head from underneath side mount.*

#### **4. KNEE ON CHEST**

In the knee on chest position the top grappler has his knee on the torso of the bottom grappler. This position is often transitioned into from side mount and is different to the other control positions in that it offers the attacker a much higher degree of mobility. If you have good balance you can use it to completely dominate an opponent and set-up many attacks. It can be an extremely uncomfortable and de-motivating position for your opponent.



*If you have good balance you can use the knee on chest position to completely dominate an opponent and set-up many attacks.*

When attacking from the knee on chest position aim to have your knee and shin all the way across the chest and not just resting on the belly. Try to keep your toes off the mat so that your opponent's chest is carrying your bodyweight and not the floor.

The knee on chest position is not as stable as conventional side control and can become unstable, especially for beginners with poor balance. You can use the outstretched leg to adjust to your opponent's movements and your balance can be maintained better by lowering your centre of gravity.

It is a reasonably mobile control position and it is therefore easy to disengage and transition to other positions. Look for opportunities to transition into the mount as they frequently present themselves.

When defending from underneath your primary objective is to escape to a better position. It is important to resist the temptation to push on the knee that is on your chest, as doing so will open you up to attacks, such as the armlock or Kimura, and will usually end up getting you submitted.



*It is important to resist the temptation to push on the knee that is on your chest, as doing so will open you up to attacks.*

## 5. FULL MOUNT

In the full mount position the top grappler is sat astride the opponent's torso, controlling the opponent with his bodyweight and hips. It is a very strong position and is second only to the back mount. It provides a great deal of control over the opponent because gravity is working for you.

There are many attacking options available from the full mount, especially chokes and armlocks. It also offers you the possibility of improving your position further by taking the back mount, especially if your opponent rolls onto his stomach in an attempt to defend. One drawback is that full mount can feel unbalanced, especially for beginners.



*There are many attacking options available from the full mount including the armlock.*

When attacking from the full mount position, keep your feet tucked in against your opponent's body at all times. It is easier to maintain your balance if you keep your head centered over your hips. Extra pressure can be applied to your opponent by keeping your knees wide and your hips low.

When defending from underneath the full mount always keep one hand near your neck to protect against chokes. You should also keep your elbows close in towards your centre to prevent being armlocked.

## **6. BACK MOUNT**

The back mount is the king of all positions in Jiu Jitsu and the ultimate positional goal. You have your opponent in back mount when you are behind him with both of your legs 'hooked' around his waist. In Jiu Jitsu we refer to these as the 'hooks'. The back

mount is such a dominant position because the opponent's neck is exposed, making him vulnerable to chokes and strangles. It is difficult and awkward for our opponent to do anything to us because we are behind him.

When attacking from the back mount position try to establish control of both the top and bottom halves of your opponent's body before initiating your attack. Take up the seatbelt grip, with one overhook and one underhook, to gain maximal control of your opponent and put your head against your his head to prevent him from bridging. Keep your hooks actively engaged and move with your opponent. Keep control of your opponent's hips and shoulders and take your time when looking for the submission. There are no major weaknesses of the back mount position but beware of crossing your feet as a skilled opponent will foot-lock you if you do so.



*Take up the 'seatbelt' position with your head against your opponents for maximal control.*

When defending against the back mount your primary objective should be to escape to a safer position. Your neck is obviously the main vulnerability in this position. Make sure it is protected by at

least one of your hands at all times. Shrugging your shoulders will provide added protection. Try to dominate the center of the fight by bridging into your opponent and keep your hips square to the ceiling to avoid falling onto your side.



*When defending against the back mount try to dominate the center of the fight by bridging into your opponent.*

## **7. TURTLE**

The turtle position is an ‘in-between’ position in that it usually occurs right after an opponent has escaped from a more powerful position such as mount or side mount. It is the most mobile of all the control positions and it is relatively easy to move around your opponent. There are several options available to the attacker including submissions, back-takes and even turning the opponent over into side mount. It can, however, be difficult to break down your opponent and find openings, especially if they are being very negative.

When attacking a turtled opponent keep your weight on him by keeping your knees off the floor. Constantly drive your hips against your opponent. If you release this hip pressure he can easily roll back into guard.



*There are numerous attacking options available when attacking a turtled opponent.*

When defending from the turtle position, protect your neck at all times as it is vulnerable to chokes and strangles in this position. Keep your elbows tucked in tight on top of your thighs to prevent your opponent from getting his hooks

## 8. POSITIONAL STRATEGY

The concept of positional strategy is integral to the understanding of Brazilian Jiu Jitsu. Not all positions are equal and some are more advantageous than others. In a Jiu Jitsu match each fighter is constantly trying to achieve positional dominance. Being in a dominant position is desirable because it almost always means that gravity and/or leverage is on your side. You are also safer when you are in a dominant position because it will be more difficult for your opponent to submit you or apply leverage against you.

### **The concept of positional dominance**

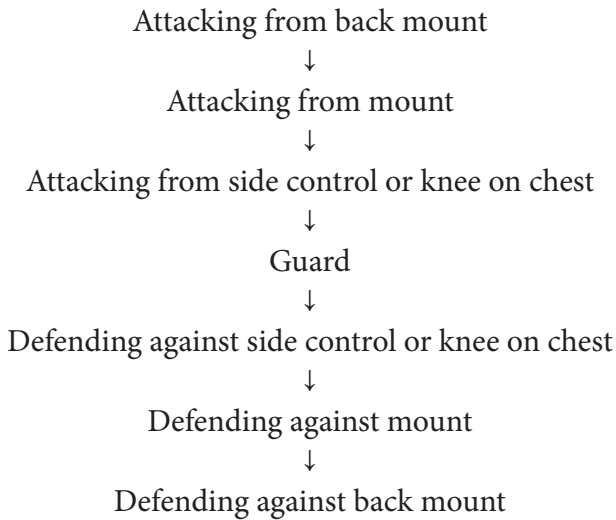
Advancing through the different positions can be likened to climbing a ladder. If we look at the fundamental positions covered in the previous chapter it can be seen that there is a clear hierarchy of positions.

Generally speaking the guard is considered to be the most even position and many practitioners favor this position and would choose preferentially to work from there. The top grappler has to strive to pass the guard in order to advance his position to side control. From here he could work to advance his position further by transitioning to the mount or the back. The bottom grappler will be attempting to sweep his opponent so that he can gain top position and advance his position also.

Most BJJ instructors agree that the positional ladder is as follows:



## MOST ADVANTAGEOUS POSITION



## MOST DISADVANTAGEOUS POSITION

### Transitioning

In order to advance your position to a more dominant one you will have to go through a 'transition'. Transition refers to any period during a match in which neither grappler has an established position, or a movement from one position to another. Your goal should always be to ensure that any transition period ends with yourself in a dominant position. If you initiate a transition it should always end with you in a position superior to the one in which were previously.

If your transitions are good enough they themselves can become an intermediate form of control. Truly great grapplers switch so quickly and fluidly between superior positions that their opponents become confused and ineffective.

## The Basic Formula

Jiu Jitsu can be broken down into the following basic formula:

1. Take your opponent to the ground using a throw or takedown.
2. Transition to a dominant position as efficiently as possible.
3. Use leverage to finish the fight by applying a choke, strangle or joint-lock.

Another way of expressing the formula is:

TAKEDOWN → TRANSITION → POSITION → SUBMISSION

Your goal should be to either improve your position even more, or finish the fight with a submission. Most beginners skip position and go straight for the submission. But the problem is that without the control afforded by the dominant position it will be extremely difficult to finish the opponent.

Trust me on this - if you want to progress as quickly as possible do not focus too much on finishing your opponent. Instead, look at the game from a positional strategy perspective and learn how to control your opponent comprehensively first.

## 9. TOP TIPS FOR BEGINNERS

Here are my top 8 concepts and techniques for beginners. I consider learning how to do all of these to be an essential part of the development of every beginner. Are these the only ‘basics’ you should know? Of course not. Another instructor would probably come up with a completely different list. But if you learn and internalize these I guarantee that’ll you’ll be a better fighter.

### **Tip 1: Relax while training.**

The acquisition of this ability is paramount to your progress in BJJ. If you train without out the ability to relax, sooner or later you will become exhausted or over-trained, and more likely than not, injured. Not only that, but training with a super-tense competitive mindset slows your progress down. It’s been proven that people learn fastest when they are relaxed.

Now all this is easier said than done. I always have other BJJ instructors asking me things like ‘How can I teach my students to relax?’ It’s been my experience that the primary factor at play when a student is unable to practice in a calm and controlled manner is his or her own ego. Nobody likes tapping out. It’s hell on the ego. The ego wants to dominate and control and to win at all costs. Let me let you in on a little secret: You’re never going to be the best jiu-jitsu fighter in the world. You’re probably never gonna be the best guy in your academy. But so what? Being the best is a fleeting and painful position to be in. You always have somebody on your ass, trying to take over the top dog spot, and sooner or later, somebody better than you comes along.

Forget about winning or losing – put your focus on learning and developing. It’s a much better long-term strategy, trust me.

## Tip 2: Practice Bridging and Shrimping

I once heard an interesting analogy, which likened grappling to a language, and a sparring match to a conversation. If grappling is a language, then bridging and shrimping can be considered the vowels. They are that crucial.

They are two of the most important examples in the collection of movements which 'sew' all your moves together.

Flavio Canto, Judo Olympian and BJJ black belt, once said 'Practice movements, not only moves.' I now understand his reasoning. Movements are versatile and can be woven into techniques. They give a big bang for your training buck. Now just because you do these drills a few times each during the warm up in class does not mean you are doing them correctly or to anywhere near their potential. I've been training for almost 12 years and I'm still refining and improving my bridge and my shrimp. And keep in mind that there are several variations on each of them. Spend time researching and practicing them and I guarantee you'll see improvements quickly.



*If you practice bridging and shrimping you will rapidly see improvements in your game.*

### **Tip 3. Grip Correctly**

One of my first coaches, Felipe Sousa, told me early in my grappling career ‘If you can’t grip then you can’t fight.’ Wise words indeed. What you need to understand is that effective gripping has three components.

The first, is the strength of your hands. Your fingers and hands will naturally become stronger after a couple of years of training, but if you want to turbo charge the process, you will need to seek out supplemental training. There are countless grip-strengthening gadgets and courses on the market, each of which I’m sure has some value. Do your research. For me, the thing that help most in developing my grip was rock climbing. Try it out and you’ll see a big improvement.

The second, is efficient gripping. No matter how strong your grip is, if you're holding onto the cloth using too much strength, your eventually forearms will fatigue and your grip will weaken.

And finally, where to grip is of vital importance. You have the strongest, most efficient gripping technique in the world, but if you're still holding onto the wrong things you'll struggle to generate the requisite amount of leverage required to achieve your objectives.

#### **Tip 4. Stand Up To Pass the Guard**

In my opinion, passing the guard is by far the most difficult aspect of BJJ. If a guy has strong legs and active hips, dealing with his guard can be absolute hell. The standing guard pass should really be called 'the standing guard break', because most of the time you're only standing for the first part, which is 'breaking' open his guard where his legs cross on your lower back.

Once his legs are open, you can proceed to pass the guard from a standing or kneeling position. But either way, to open the guard of an decent Jiu Jitsoka you invariably have to stand up. Sure, there are some techniques for breaking open the guard from on your knees, but try them out against someone reasonably tall and with decent leg strength and let me know how that works out for you.



*Standing is the most efficient way for beginners to break open an opponents guard.*

## **Tip 5. Learn to Escape Side Mount**

Escapes are not glamorous or crowd-pleasing, but up to at least purple belt they're the most important aspect of your game. And escaping side mount is the most important part of the defensive aspect to your game. After years of practicing, teaching and refining this aspect of BJJ, I've identified three components that I believe are key to getting it right.

First, you have to protect your neck at all times. You can have the best escape move in the world but if you're getting choked out it's not going help you. Keep at least one hand in easy reach of your lapels at all times.

Second is bridging and shrimping (sound familiar?). The secret is in learning to perform these moves with the correct timing and combine them. The one (bridging) usually precedes the other (shrimping). There are many more details to this which I will cover in a future video or article.

Finally, you must learn how to combo the ‘guard replacement’ and ‘go to knees’ escapes. If you know how to do these two well you will have a good chance in 90 percent of all side mount situations.



*Escaping side mount is the most important part of the defensive aspect to your game.*

## **Tip 6. Control Your Breathing**

Your ability to learn and perform on the mat is linked to your state of mind, which is in turn linked to your breath. If your breathing is smooth and even, it more likely than not that your movements will be the same. But if you’re panting and gasping for air, I can assure you that your jits won’t be effective or cool to watch.

Another interesting thing about breath control is that it can also help you deal with the ego. By concentrating on the flow of your



inhalations and exhalations and the movement of your breath through your body, you will be able to largely disassociate from any self-talk that might distract you from your sparring or drilling.



*Rickson Gracie is a master of breath control.*

## **Tip 7: Learn the Straight Armlock From Guard**

This is the first submission I teach my private students. Although in application it appears simple, it's actually a complex technique with many points to it. Learning and memorizing a complex sequence from start to finish is of great benefit for beginner students. I can't explain the neuroscience behind it, but it's been my experience that once they have done this comprehensively for at least one move, learning all subsequent moves becomes easier.

In addition to this, understanding the straight armlock from guard also imbues the jiu-jitsoka with insight into several key grappling concepts including grip control, head control, creating angles of attack, and using the hip/core/glute drive to apply leverage



*The straight armlock from guard is the first submission I teach my private students.*

## **Tip 8: Learn the The Scissor Sweep**

I once heard that Rickson considers the scissor sweep the most important of all. If it's true I can understand why. The scissor sweep is important because to do it properly you have to incorporate several principles that are vital to most sweeps.

- Control of the wrist and arm of the side you are sweeping to.

If you don't do this, you'll never complete the sweep in a million years. Overlooking this one detail is the main contributing factor to failed sweeps in my opinion.

- Powering these sweep using the hips and trunk as opposed to the arms.

Most of the time, if you're using your arms to power a movement you're operating inefficiently. Watch how beginners will try to move their opponents using arm strength almost exclusively when doing this. With the scissor sweep the kicking of the legs provides most of the power.

- Facilitating the inversion by raising your opponent's center of gravity.

With good scissor-sweeping technique, you use the top leg and lapel-grip to elevate your partner's hips by pulling him towards you. This raises his center of gravity (pelvis) and makes it far easier to flip him over. This is a common element in most sweeps and reversals. For more information on the scissor sweep check out one of the hundreds of YouTube instructionals – try to identify the principles above while you're watching them.



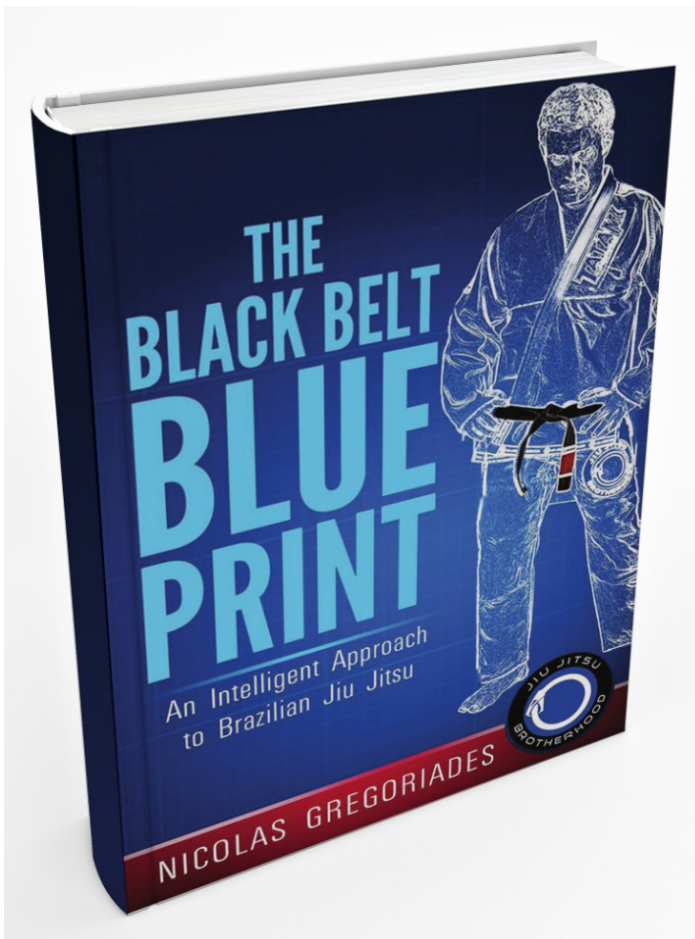
*The scissor sweep is important because to do it properly you have to incorporate several principles that are vital to most sweeps.*

## 9. OTHER RESOURCES

### The Black Belt Blueprint

The comprehensive, bestselling guide to Brazilian Jiu Jitsu by Nicolas Gregoriades.

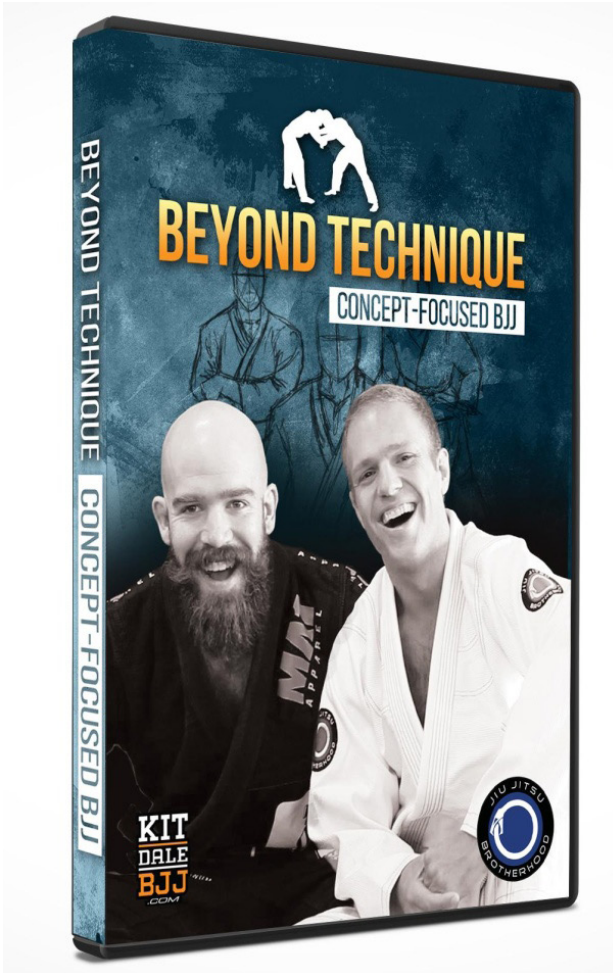
<http://tinyurl.com/kvfqrvo>



## Beyond Technique

The smash-hit concept-focused instructional video by Kit Dale and Nic Gregoriades.

<http://tinyurl.com/kfj8tjx>



## BJJ Building Blocks

The ultimate foundational course for BJJ, featuring the essential techniques that you have to know!

<http://tinyurl.com/kynn6ar>



## Digital Grappling

The world's first active grappling learning tool!

<https://digitalgrappling.com>



## 10. ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Nicolas Gregoriades is a martial artist and spiritual explorer from Cape Town, South Africa. In 2003 he moved to London to earn his black belt in Jiu Jitsu. There he founded the popular martial arts community, The Jiu Jitsu Brotherhood and became the first person to be awarded the black belt by the legendary Roger Gracie.

He is also the co-host of the bi-monthly podcast The Journey which discusses a broad range of topics related to life in the modern world. In late 2012 he took a trip to the amazon to drink the sacred plant medicine, Ayahuasca, which profoundly affected his world view and caused him to drastically change his life path.

He now travels the world teaching Jiu Jitsu, studying yoga and learning about the human experience.

You can share in his discoveries here:

[www.thejourneypodcast.com](http://www.thejourneypodcast.com)

[www.jiujitsubrotherhood.com](http://www.jiujitsubrotherhood.com)