

How to Find a Martial Arts School That's Right for You

These days, there seems to be a martial arts school on every street corner. How do you decide if a particular school is right for you? Especially before sinking a lot of money into it? The following questions and suggestions will hopefully guide you to find a good school, one that you will be happy with for years to come.

Basic Questions to Ask Yourself

- What type of training am I looking for? Do I want sport training? Self-defense training? Traditional martial arts training? Weapons training?
- Will it be appropriate for my age?

As a rule, sport and tournament training should begin before the age of 30, while the body is receptive to changes and severe stretching. If you are over age 30 you may want to consider a defensive system or traditional martial art.

Visiting a Prospective School

By all means, plan to visit each school to observe and ask questions. It is the only way you'll get a feel for how knowledgeable the instructor is, and how he/she conducts their school.

Observations

- What type of attitude does the instructor have?
- When talking to an instructor, her/his demeanor should be polite, humble and yet firm. Be wary of the instructor who is boisterous or bullish, bordering on egomania.
- Is the school clean and well maintained?
Don't confuse this with how large and well equipped a school is. Some very good instructors teach out of small, humble locations. However, unclean conditions promote the spread of athlete's foot, the common cold, and other communicable diseases.
- How do the students interact with each other and the instructor?
- Is the atmosphere casual ("Hey, John, let's work on some punching drills tonight!") or more formal ("Excuse me, Sensei, would you help me with my kata?")? Each method has its benefits. Which do you prefer?

Questions to Ask the Instructor

- What type of martial arts do you teach?
- May I attend or watch a class before signing up?
- Do I have to sign a contract?
- How long is the contract for?
- Does it provide for a leave of absence, without financial obligation, for illness, injury, or job displacement?
- Does the contract provide a cancellation of the contract, with no financial obligation, if

given a 30-day written notice?

- Who can I expect to be taught by? Will it be you, another black belt, or one of your advanced students?
- How much are your lessons?
- How many classes can I attend each week?
- How often are students tested?
- How much is the testing fee?
- What equipment will I need over the period of the contract?
- How much will it cost?
- Must I purchase it from this school?
- Will you put everything you have explained into me in writing?
- Can I take a couple of days to think about it?

Background Check

This may be the most important check. To do a background check on a school and its instructors:

1. Ask the person giving the pitch for written information describing the style and its teachers.
2. Upon receiving the written information, go to the Internet and run key words and names through online search engines such as Google (<http://google.com>). Read what comes up.
3. If you have questions, require the person giving the pitch to answer them to your satisfaction. Also consider asking the same questions at online bulletin boards such as E-budo (<http://www.e-budo.com>). A search engine that will help you find online bulletin boards is <http://www.webcom.com/impulse/list.html#Search>.
4. Finally, if required to sign a contract longer than 30 days, make inquiries about the school and the instructor at the Better Business Bureau and Attorney General's office prior to signing.

Making a Decision

If you are pleased with the answers the instructor has given you, and you like what is being taught, by all means sign up.

If you have doubts, or the instructor is pressuring you to sign up now, or is reluctant to put what he/she said in writing, *continue your search!*

Remember: There is no such thing as a bad system, only bad instructors!