

Disguising Repetition in Self-Defense Techniques

We all know that the key to developing practical self-defense skills is in mastering the appropriate movements. The challenge with this is that most students become bored with the techniques they are learning before they have them committed to memory.

As a professional instructor, your major objective is to develop your students into the best Martial Artist possible, while keeping their interest high. Remember, when the interest is high they will keep coming back. The more often they come back to class, the better they will become. So you will need to trick them onto doing what they don't want to do...the same thing over and over again. Trick into doing the same thing while they think that they are doing something fun and different.

Pick one of your self-defense techniques or one step that you want your students to practice more. Then vary the way they practice it using the following drills. It is important to keep your technique accurate to your style. To keep the students from getting sloppy, don't vary the technique but vary the drill.

Just prior to when the students start to get bored, switch the drill but keep the same technique. (The best time to switch is when they are beginning to feel comfortable and having fun with it.)

Once your students have the basic idea of a particular self-defense or one-step technique, vary the way you have them practice it. The following is a list of drills to keep self-defense training fun. (Note: See Instructors Training Manual #1 for more Self-Defense Drills)

Back and Forth – Each person performs the self-defense technique back and forth on his or her partner. To make this more interesting, you can have them vary the speed of the attack and vary the speed of the counter from slow motion to full speed.

Rotating Line Drill – Have your class line up in two lines, facing a partner. Everybody on one side attacks, while the other side defends.

After one attack, everyone rotates one place to the left. Remember, the same side always attacks, so as the class rotates down the line, they will eventually end up on the other side and doing the opposite of what they started out doing.

Defender in the Middle – Have three or four students surround one student. The student in the middle must defend, using the same technique. The students on the outside attack the student in the middle (usually in a clockwise direction). After each outside student has attacked, put a new person in the middle. Do this until everybody has a chance to be in the middle.

Spontaneous Defense – This is the same drill as above, only the attackers do not go in any order. Each student attacks when he or she feels like it. This way the person in the middle must be ready for an attack from any direction.

Blind Defense – Have the person in the middle close their eyes (or you can use a blindfold) and respond when he senses an attack. CAUTION the attackers to BE CAREFUL.

Attacker in the Middle – Same as “Defender in the Middle”, except the person in the middle randomly attacks those on the outside.

Odd Man Out – Use this drill when you have an odd number of students in class. Pair up the students, and the student without a partner does a set number of push-ups while everyone else is doing attacks or defenses on each other. When the odd person completes his push-ups, everyone must get a new partner as quickly as possible. To add excitement and energy, they must yell while looking for a new partner.

Add Ons – Another way to make a self-defense technique more interesting is to blend it with other kicking or punching routines. Example: After the students finish a self-defense technique, have them add on a kick or sparring combination at the end. Mixing and matching various sparring routines with self-defense techniques offers an unlimited amount of exciting possibilities.

Have fun with it!

Team Self-Defense Monkey Line – Have students break up into teams of four or five in single file lines facing one team member. On the instructor's command, all the team members attack the first person in line one at a time. When everyone has attacked that person, he goes to the end of the line and the next person steps out to be attacked. Each team tries to be the first one done.

It is important to teach your students to not take any one particular self-defense technique too seriously. In a real situation, the technique would rarely come out as originally planned. The purpose of teaching set self-defense techniques is to develop your student's arsenal and to show possible solutions to potentially dangerous situations. The concepts taught behind self-defense are more important than the actual techniques. One way to help the student develop the concept of a particular self-defense technique is to have them do it against a variety of attacks. For example: If you teach a particular technique for a right punch, have your students find a way to work the same move for a chest or wrist grab, or vice versa. This helps them analyze the movements more thoroughly, thereby understanding the concepts on a deeper level.

Note: Once your students understand the self-defense techniques well enough to apply them to any attacks, you can do all of the previously listed drills with varied rather than specific attacks.

Contact Training:

Students should be taught to practice control when performing techniques on a partner. It is also important that students learn to make contact. Everything that is taught and practiced in the air should also be performed on a surface. This way, students actually get in the habit of making contact. The last thing that you would want to have happen is to be confronted with a self-defense situation and have to consciously think about making contact. You would want that to be natural. In order for that to be natural, you'll have to have practices the moves on a surface.

Making contact with surfaces adds an important element to disguising repetition in Martial Arts training, and also gives your students the additional benefits of striking with the same type of force used in self-defense situations.

Take the same techniques that you have used in other drills and practice them on a surface. Start out with a relatively simple version or technique. Have the students make harder contact than they would in a partner drill (but not necessarily full contact yet). After the student is conditioned to surface contact training, it is recommended to increase the impact up to the force necessary in a real self-defense situation. Save the full contact for advanced training, after the students have been conditioned to impact. Remember, we want to avoid injury – injured students are much more likely to quit than healthy ones.

Disguising Repetition in Forms

These drills will not only help your student learn their forms better, they will help them prepare for tournaments or tests. It's important to be able to do the form regardless of the surrounding environment. This forces your student to go internally and focus on exactly what they are doing at the present time.

The following drills will be the ones that you perform with your students after they have their basics forms down.

Start with a very basic form. Have your students do the normal form from start to finish. This helps remind them of the form and gives them a point of reference. Now, vary the way in which you have them do the form.

Forms Class Ideas

The following exercises are helpful (once a form is completed) in truly testing the knowledge of the form and increasing strength in various movements.

Stop and Turn – Whenever the instructor says stop, he will have the students turn to face in another direction. Continue the form from that point. Once again, have them stop and change directions. Do this several times. This forces the students to have an internal reference as to the direction of the next move within the form. This helps to have them break the habit using the mirrors or walls as a source of direction.

Slow Motion – Doing a form in this fashion allows you to analyze and pay attention to details that may be missed at regular speed.

Iso Kinetically – Have your students go slowly, muscling the whole form and putting as much power into each movement as possible. Super slow, super tight, super intense. Really emphasize those stances. This really makes you think about the middle movements, not the beginning or the end, but what happens between the start and the finish of a movement.

Footwork Only – This allows you to concentrate your energy just on stances and stance transitions.

Bunkai – (application) Going through each movement with a live attacker. This keeps us from forgetting the original meaning of every move.

Blindfolded – This teaches you to gain your bearings without the use of sight; forcing you to use your other senses more thoroughly.

Different Directions – To really know a form, you should be able to face any direction when beginning, and still finish correctly.

Mild Distraction – Have other students try to distract the performing student within the following rules: They can wave at him, holler at him, even touch him lightly. The performing student's mission is to get through the whole form without smiling, laughing, or making a mistake. If they can't, they will have to start over.

Intermediate Distractions – The rules on the intermediate distractions are to KEEP IT SAFE, so there should be no hitting - in the head or certain other body parts. However, we will be creating not only a verbal distraction, but also an actual physical distraction. Reasonable contact and mild pushing, etc. are allowed. CAUTION: This can get really out of hand. LAY THE GROUND RULES OUT FIRMLY AND WATCH THEM LIKE A HAWK. "BREAK" THEM IF THEY GET OUT OF CONTROL.

Just Handwork – Stand in a horse stance and perform just the hand technique. This is a great test of memory and coordination.

Synchronized Form – Two or more people performing the same form in unison. This is an excellent test of timing and confidence.

Continuous Form – Do the same form over and over without pause. This is an excellent method of developing stamina as well as ingraining this form into your memory banks.

Competition – Nothing puts more pressure on you than competition, either in class or in a tournament. If you can successfully complete your form, keeping your composure the whole way, you know the form.

From time to time, most teachers go through dry spells when they aren't feeling creative or inspired. This can often reflect in their classes and is usually frustrating for students and teachers alike. At times like these, it is nice to have resources to draw from.

Training manuals and seminars are helpful and can often make the difference between a ho-hum class and an exciting class. They are, however, not always necessary. The seeds of countless ideas for great classes are hidden within each and every instructor. The possible variations on drills are unlimited. There are virtually no limits. It is just a matter of how creative YOU ARE. How can you be more creative? Set aside some time and ask the right questions.

When trying to develop new ideas for the classroom, here are some questions that might help.

1. What areas of my student's training needs the most help? i.e. - forms, basics, kicking, blocking, etc.
2. What qualities do they need to develop more thoroughly? i.e. – stances, reaction time, speed, power, teamwork, balance, endurance, flexibility, accuracy, form, etc.
3. Do I need the assistance of some type of training aids? i.e. – targets focus pads, kicking shields, blocks, etc.
4. How many students are in class and how should I break them up? i.e. – with a partner, in groups of two or three, large groups, etc.

Remember, the answer almost always lies in the question. When you want to vary a specific drill, change the ingredients (a little or a lot, depending on how much you want to change the drill) and you will have an entirely new drill.

The possibilities of “Disguising Repetition” are unlimited. It only takes time, willingness, and a little imagination.
GOOD LUCK!!!