

# MASTERING JIU JITSU, ONE MOVE AT A TIME

## *HOW TO MAXIMIZE TRAINING EFFICIENCY*

By Jayson Patino

As a Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu black belt, I am still constantly on the hunt for new, effective techniques to add to my arsenal. Throughout the years I have found myself, like many other Jiu-Jitsu players, trying to learn too much at once. This usually leads to “kind of” knowing a lot of different techniques, and not really “mastering” many. ***Every student should have a “Go To” submission that they’re known for hitting on a regular basis.*** This is also known as your “Bread and Butter.” It is usually the submission that you have the highest percentage of finishing. For example, if you were down by several points in a competition with only 30 seconds left, what submission would you go for?

Jiu-Jitsu focuses so much on intricate details in order to make a technique work while grappling live. Effective instructors teach you to drill techniques over and over to develop muscle memory. This will allow you to perform a technique without thinking, using only instinct. Jiu-Jitsu is most effective when you know a technique so well that you react without thinking. As the famous Saulo Ribeiro quote goes, ***“If you think, you are too late. If you are late, you use strength. If you use strength, you tire. If you tire, you die.”***

I have found that if you ***make your goal to master one technique at a time, whether it is a submission, sweep, guard pass, etc., your Jiu-Jitsu game will become much more effective in the long run.*** This strategy can help you whether you are a white belt or a seasoned black belt. I don’t literally mean you can only practice one move at a time. You should definitely go to class as much as possible and drill whatever technique is being taught that day. Always keep an open

mind, but also have a specific move you are trying to master. You have to constantly gain new knowledge in a sport that has hundreds of techniques and multiple variations of each.

Talk to your instructor about techniques that are working or not working for you. Keep in mind they probably have many students and it may be difficult for them to assess your whole grappling game. You should ***be your own coach*** and constantly assess yourself. You know your Jiu-Jitsu game better than anyone. So who better to acknowledge that you need work in certain areas?

As a beginner starting your BJJ journey, ***find a submission that comes to you naturally and fits your body type and style of grappling.*** Tall people, for example, tend to pick up triangle chokes, darce chokes, and anaconda chokes easily because of their longer limbs. Shorter people often have more success with guillotines, rear naked chokes and arm triangles. Analyze yourself as a grappler and see what submission seems to work for you more than others. Don't limit yourself to only those submissions but know where you're stronger.

Always focus on solid fundamentals. Although it's fun learning the cool, flashy techniques, your focus should be on mastering effective fundamental techniques. You must build a solid foundation before expanding to advanced moves.

***Executing a technique can be broken up into three parts.*** Each part has several different variations depending on how your opponent reacts. I'll use an armbar from guard for example. The first part is everything leading up to the armbar (i.e. set ups). How are you going to disguise your armbar? You usually have to control their arm somehow, break their posture and attack something different to distract them, etc. The second part is the actual execution of the technique. Which grip are you using to control their arm? Are you going to put your foot on the hip to get a better angle or do you shoot your hips up and attack the arm in one motion? The third part is the finish and/or counters to their defenses. Do you stay in your guard or roll them over to finish? If they stack you are you going to roll underneath or transition to another attack?

***Focus on each part individually to maximize the effectiveness of your attack.*** Learn as many set ups, variations, finishes and counters for your submission as you can. Learn them in a series of attacks. If one movement or attack doesn't work, transition to another, then another,

then another if necessary. The more you practice attacking in a series of attacks as opposed to a singular attack, the more effective you'll be at submitting your opponent.

Another great learning tool is to ***teach the technique to someone else***. Your brain retains more information when you have to explain it to someone else. Teaching someone the details will really help the technique "stick" in your head. Your teammates will also appreciate you sharing knowledge with them.

Practice your submission relentlessly. You want to ***get as much drilling as possible***. Set a goal for how many repetitions you want to do that day. When you are first practicing a new technique, go slow to make sure you hit every detail. Once you have the details down, practice in realistic speed and have your partner give you different feels for how they might react. Remember, "*Practice doesn't make perfect. Perfect practice makes perfect!*"

***Then get as much live practice as you can***, specifically trying to hit that move from anywhere possible. Start live grappling in specific positions or situations that allow you to get to your move easily. If you want to master the armbar, start in your guard every time possible. If you are working on passing the guard, start in your partner's guard. For several months repeatedly try to use it while grappling live and learn the most common ways people defend it. Practice new techniques on white belts then work your way up to higher belts. If you are able to successfully submit someone repeatedly, show them how to defend it. This way you can work on your counter to that defense. Ask your training partners questions about how they like to set up that submission or defend it. Once you ***learn the best defenses to your move, you can figure out the best ways to identify and counter those defenses***. This way you will be one step ahead of your opponent when they try to defend. This will also improve your defense if someone else tries the same attack on you.

***A great exercise you can do is making a list of your strengths and weaknesses in several different positions***. Once you've made your list, prioritize the weaknesses from most important (1), to least important (3). Let's say your weaknesses were the scissor sweep, the omaplata submission and passing the guard. Learning to pass the guard (1) would be highest priority. Learning the scissor sweep (2) is important, but not as important as knowing how to

pass someone's guard. A harder submission like an omaplata (3) would be least important compared to the other techniques. All are important techniques to improve on, but knowing what hole in your game is the biggest will help you improve quicker overall. If you're not really sure what you should work on first, ask your instructor.

Once you've prioritized your weaknesses, write down ways that you can turn those weaknesses into your strengths. Examples of ways to improve weaknesses include: asking your training partners or instructor, watching instructionals online, getting to class early or staying late to practice, attending seminars, doing private lessons, etc.

*Use your list of strengths and weaknesses as a long term curriculum for yourself.* Continue practicing new techniques as they're taught to you in class but also work on your long term goals of learning new series of techniques that help your game specifically. After a few months, go back and make a new list to see where you have improved and what new weaknesses you have discovered.

Once you've mastered your move, usually after several months and hundreds of repetitions, it will become a part of you. You won't have to think about the details or the counters to defenses, you'll just do it. Then you can move on to mastering another technique. Put the same amount of time and effort into learning a new series of attacks. Try to learn different techniques that can be tied together as a *chain of attacks*. When your opponent defends one, you seamlessly transition to another.

When I first started grappling I only knew one submission: the guillotine. For a couple years that was the only submission I went for when grappling live or competing. All of my professional MMA wins and most of my early grappling tournament wins came by way of guillotine. Higher belts would say that I didn't even know Jiu-Jitsu, but I had one hell of a guillotine. It really helped my confidence to know that if I grabbed your neck there was a real good chance I was going to submit you. However, once I made my list of strengths and weaknesses, I realized I had a lot to work on. I later focused on mastering armbars, then deep half guard, then kimuras, then rear naked chokes and then leg locks. Every time I switched to another move I would become obsessed with learning every detail of why the move worked and the best defenses to counter that move.

This strategy has helped me win several championships and a World title. My students have won many team championships using that strategy as well. I was always taught to work harder than everyone else, but I think it is even more important to work smarter than everyone else. Practice self-discipline and spend some time improving your grappling outside of the gym. Write down your goals and ways to achieve them. Know what your “Go To” submission, guard pass and sweep is, and what the backup is for each. Remember that mental strength is an invaluable asset and a product of great work ethic and self-confidence. Be positive, believe in yourself and try to be the best grappler you can be. Although Jiu-Jitsu has so many benefits and ways it can improve your life, it’s a lot more fun when you’re making the other guy tap out.

**Here is a recap of the important points to help you:**

1. *Every student should have a “Go To” submission.*
2. *Make your goal to master one technique at a time, whether it is a submission, sweep, guard pass, etc.*
3. *Be your own coach.*
4. *Find a submission that comes to you naturally and fits your body type and style of grappling.*
5. *Executing a technique can be broken up into three parts. Focus on each part individually to maximize the effectiveness of your attack.*
6. *Teach the technique to someone else.*
7. *Get as much drilling as possible and then get as much live practice as you can.*
8. *Learn the best defenses to your move so you can figure out the best ways to identify and counter those defenses.*
9. *Make a list of your strengths and weaknesses in several different positions.*
10. *Use your list of strengths and weaknesses as a long term curriculum for yourself.*