



Relaxation for Martial-Arts Improvement

by Keith Pascal

This is NOT a Free eBook!

Please don't give out copies of this book. It is unethical, dishonest, and not befitting of a true martial artist.

And I won't be able to write more eBooks, because I will be too busy suing the dishonest people out there!

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If expert counseling of any kind, including legal, is required, the services of competent professional people should be sought for each specific area in question. And you should do a lot of your own research too.

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1

Introduction

This is not your typical relaxation book for the martial arts. At least, I hope it isn't.

We do start from the traditional point of view of using relaxation for health reasons, but we quickly expand to encompass everything from learning techniques faster to gaining an advantage in a wrist-lock situation.

Even though this book refers to complicated concepts such as Lozanov's Method of Suggestopedia, everything will be broken down into easy, manageable steps.

By the way, you'll use the Lozanov method both for memorization in the martial arts and for technique perfection. Impressive.

In Chapters Six and Seven, you learn at least four different ways to relax. You'll apply one of those methods or a combination of methods to help your improvement in the martial arts. You'll even learn a method used by Bruce Lee -- you can perform this technique almost anywhere.

You'll also improve both your precision and your speed. There are a couple of chapters dealing with both issues.

You'll even learn to identify tension telegraphs in other martial artists. It's one more way to know when your attacker is going to attack ahead of time.

The last chapter in the book will give you an advantage in a fight, if someone tries to wrist or joint lock you. Combine this principle with some of the techniques found in [Wrist Locks: From Protecting Yourself to Becoming an Expert](#), and you may just get the advantage that you need in an emergency.

Test and try everything in this book. Keep what fits you. Bruce Lee said to 'absorb what is useful.' You need some element of relaxation in your martial arts training. May this book offer you that nugget that advances you further on your journey toward mastery.

To your success ...and relaxation,

Keith Pascal

2

Three Important Types of Martial-Arts Relaxation

Why do you practice martial arts?

Do you want the most effective way to defend yourself? Interested in the historical or cultural perspective of the arts? Are you trying to improve your hand-eye coordination? Are you looking for a sport to compete in?

Many people take up new hobbies and sports to relax.

I took up martial arts to learn self defense. I achieved this goal years ago. **So why do I continue to practice?**

For me, martial arts offers three types of relaxation. Or more accurately — There are at least three types of activities that give me benefits of relaxation....



Slow and Easy

I am definitely not a kata junkie. For me, the need to constantly link my technique practice to reality. Practicing forms just isn't 'real' enough for my progressive taste.

Yet, I practice the first form in wing chun, Sil Lum Tao, a lot. Practicing a form slowly is a wonderful way to relax.

- * You leave the cares of the outside world behind.
- * It's meditative because you are only concentrating on one thing ... the technique of the moment.
- * You are training your muscles in precise movements — techniques to be practiced at a faster pace, later.
- * Often, breath control is part of the form.

There is something calming about shutting out the rest of the world just long enough to quietly put yourself through the paces.

I am not the only one who finds this the perfect opportunity to get in touch with nature and our environment...



- * Once, my wife hiked to the top of the pyramid of the Sun, at the ruins of Teotihuacán, outside Mexico City. At the top, she looked around, settled into her stance, shut her eyes, and did a form — slowly. When she opened her eyes, an older Chinese man was patiently waiting and watching her. He didn't speak English, Spanish, or Italian, and she didn't speak Chinese — so their communication was limited. Still he wanted to

know how a little blue-eyed lady, half way around the world could be doing the same form that he did. He asked with hand gestures to take her picture.

*Recently, we had a two and a half hour wait at the Canadian — United States border. What to do? I got out of the car, found a nice patch of grass, and slowly went through a form. When I was done, I felt as if I had the patience to wait another couple of hours.



* Every other year, my teacher has a small reunion near some beautiful falls, in Oregon. I am an early riser. It calms me just thinking about looking at my brethren doing the tai chi form at 6:00 am, on the lawn. I don't even have to do the form to get that relaxed feeling.

* Picnics, trips to the river, swimming by the lake, and even a trip to the Oregon coast all offer opportunities to relax by going through a form slowly.



Sometimes, Slow Just Isn't Enough

Would you like to feel good?

Exercise!

I have mentioned in various articles of Martial Arts Mastery, that Dick

Burrow, who passed away a few years ago, insisted all of his instructors make their students sweat at each and every class.

Smart man. He knew about endorphin-release in the brain. By making everyone exercise hard enough to break into a sweat at each and every class, he was making sure the students and instructors would feel good about themselves and about the class.

In a sense, he was creating an addiction — a positive one. Everyone wants to feel good — he was providing the means.

While it's true that I practice my form slowly 10 times for every one time I do it fast, I also believe in breaking a sweat.

Believe it or not, by exercising the body at a fast pace, you are helping the body to feel more at ease, energized, and relaxed — and I don't just mean tired. Still, it's a 'good' tired feeling. Those who have experienced the cool down after exercise exhaustion, know what I am talking about.

When I am feeling either tired, or on the flip side, antsy, I might fire off 500 punches in a row.

When I am wound up, a good round of leg raises in each direction, followed by some kick practice is just what the doctor ordered

And speaking of doctors, you really should have a doctor's approval before starting any new exercise regime. Got it? Good.

Besides kicking and punching, a good workout on the mook jong (wooden dummy) or some fast, aerobic weapons practice gets my heart rate up. And that's the goal.

You need to work at an aerobic level. Occasionally pick up the pace, so you're out of breath, then drop back down to an aerobic level. By alternating the intensity of the exercise, I make sure that I get a little winded and break a sweat.

Of course you could jog, jump rope, swim, or ride a bike — but the focus of this eBooklet is martial arts — so, back to punching.



Anger Releasing

Have you ever been so mad, the muscles on your neck were tensing? You were about to pop a vein. Everyone stayed clear.

Those are the times when folks should be alone — unless your practice partner is willing to risk bruises.

Those times of anger are perfect for you to be by yourself. You get to practice controlling your anger.

How?

Pound the snot out of something over and over. Do 30-second rounds of punching the heavy bag at full intensity. How many rounds will it take to get you back to normal?

Maybe the heavy bag deserves a kick or two...hundred. Really send it flying. Kick it. Kick it again ... and again. Continue kicking it until your anger goes away.



Special trick: As you feel your anger fade, smile. It's important. Studies have shown that our bodies react to smiles. If you get the face muscles smiling, the body actually tries to shift to a better mood. There is even a chemical release in the brain.

Sure, if you can think pleasant thoughts, great. But just the smiling can provide benefit, too. Try it.



We don't always have a heavy bag available. Sometimes I pick up an escrima stick. I pound on the mook jong with it. I take it outside and work angles pounding branches of a sturdy tree. Sometimes I pound on a piece of wood.

For many, actually making contact with something helps work out their anger better. They just don't get the same effect by punching the air.

In the general sense, martial arts helps you to learn to calm your mind and to eliminate fear. But for me, it serves as a way for me to relax and to shake off the outside world for a few minutes. Any of the above techniques will help you to relax more.

Can you imagine the benefit you'll get if you practice all three?

Make sure you do a slow form every day. At every workout, make sure you break into a sweat. And when you are angry, vent your aggression alone, against a mean heavy bag.

Ahhh, the joy of relaxation.



3

Learn Faster Now!

James McGill wrote to **Martial Arts Mastery** and offered suggestions on the effects of relaxation. I lifted a couple of snippets from his letter. They support two very important points about the relaxation of muscles in martial arts.

The first point will seem fairly obvious to half of our subscribers. It's the other half that needs to pay particular attention.

The second point will help folks learn techniques at a faster rate. You'll see what I mean.

Here's the first snippet that James wrote:

ÒSomething recently occurred to me that may be of use in a future issue of MAM-the importance of relaxation. You often teach readers techniques to make their punches and kicks faster. Of course, timing is crucial, but relaxing may be equally important.

...soon after I had learned a few punches, I went to a Go match at a local club. (The ancient Chinese game)

I was joking around with one of the members and threw a few of my newly-learned punches to show my fighting spirit. Suddenly his eyes narrowed and he looked at me intently.

He said, 'You're too stiff, your body is floating. (I think he meant my center of gravity was too high.) Just relax and let the punches out.' I was surprised by the sudden boxing lesson. A Korean man, I think he had seen his share of boxers, in and out of the ring!

However, I took his advice and what a difference it made! I realized that I didn't have to try to punch through walls like the Agents in 'Matrix'. I am 100 kg and fairly muscular. If my fist makes contact with someone they are going to feel it!



It sounds like James met a smart man at the Go Tourney.

I'll talk more about the 'your body is floating' comment in Section #4 of this issue.

Did you notice the rest of James' comments?

If you read between the lines, or if you have read 'The New Punch Papers,' then you know that the best punches are relaxed all the way until the point of impact.

In my mind, the most powerful punches are the ones that are the most relaxed.

Those who have truly powerful punches agree with James and me. The rest only think they have real power behind their strikes. I believe there is an experiment in 'The Punch Papers' eBook that proves this point.

You inhibit power when you tense all the way through the technique.

This may seem too basic for many of you — use it as a reminder of the advantage that you have over half the martial artists out there.

Also, keep in mind that almost every beginner who comes into my garage first has to learn to relax. They need to drop their shoulders — they are too tense. They should whip the punch out and tense the instant before impact.

James goes on to say:

There is one particularly nasty kind of [guitar] chord called a bar cord. To make it, you have to use 3 or 4 fingers, and your index finger has to go straight across all 6 strings (like a bar).

When I first saw one in the chord book I thought, Jeez, what is this? On my first attempts I pressed down all of my fingers and squeezed the guitar neck so tightly I thought it was going to snap in half!

Of course, you can imagine what the chord sounded like someone missing a shift in a standard transmission car! I thought it would take me months to master them.

In the guitar home page, Mr. Andreas gave a step by step description of how to make the chords, featuring relaxation before each step.

I read his advice and thought it made sense so I gave it a try. In 5 minutes I had produced a reasonable bar chord with literally a fraction of the energy expended on my earlier attempts. Martial artists tend to be dedicated, gung-ho people who are tempted to grit through new techniques.

However, I suspect they would learn them faster and better with more relaxation.



James McGill is right on the money!

There is a method of learning called The Lozanov Method of Suggestopedia. I read about it extensively to aid in foreign language instruction.

You can find out more about it in the 'Super Learning Books' — There are several titles in print.

In a nutshell, you learn to relax to get your brain waves functioning at a certain level. Then you link learning at a specific pace to a particular kind of music.

Classical Baroque provides the right tempo for learning.

You would be amazed at how fast people can learn and retain a foreign language using this method.

Ultimately, I wasn't able to incorporate the whole method into my language instruction, but in the back of my head, I thought

Hmmm — how could this strategy be applied to martial arts learning?

I'll write more on the method in the next two chapters.

For now, keep in mind, the best way to learn something new is with a relaxed body, and an open mind. Being tense inhibits learning.



4

A Lozanov Method of Technique Memorization for the Martial Arts

As mentioned in the last chapter, the Lozanov method of Suggestopedia can be found in the Super Learning Books.

This Chapter provides a quick and dirty method of one way to use the method to speed technique memorization. For more depth and scientific reasoning behind each step, refer to the experts — Ostrander and Shroeder.

Whether you have to memorize a long sequence, such as kata, form or individual martial arts techniques, this method could really help you.

Step One:

Get in the right frame of mind.

In Suggestopedia, you need to get in an alpha brain wave state. You do this by learning to relax. You relax mind and body. You leave the cares of the day behind you. Worries fade into the background.

Once your brain and body are relaxed — heartbeat slowed a bit, you are ready to begin.



Step Two:

Play baroque music. You are looking for music that has 60 beats per minute. Soft classical music is fine, here are a few examples of titles that will work:

Largo, from Winter, *The Four Seasons* — Vivaldi

Largo from Concerto #1 in F from *Music for Royal Fireworks* —
Handel

Largo from Concerto in G Minor for Flute and Strings — Bach

Bach and Telemann Flute Concertos — Jean-Pierre Rampal

If you're the teacher explain the purpose of the music is to match brain waves — you really should read one of the books. Give the scientific explanation, so your students 'buy into' your reasoning, or at least keep an open mind.



Step three:

Get an agreed signal, maybe lifting your hand in the air. Your students respond, when you give the signal.

If you are working solo, you perform the technique as soon as you call it out, or as soon as you hear it being uttered on the tape you have recorded for yourself — did I mention, that you really should look into reading one of the books. Check it out from your library, if you don't want a copy on your bookshelf.

Ok, you call out a technique — you give them just a second to think about it, then you snap your fingers — give whatever signal you have agreed upon. They all perform the technique together.

I give the signal, so we don't always have a leader — a student who beats everyone to the technique. I want each student to rely on his or her own memory, not the lead student.

The more I get them in sync now, the more their memories will benefit.

Yes, I am aware that there will be one or two 'lag-behinds.' They don't have the technique memorized, so they look to someone who performs it on the beat — the follow an instant later.

While this may sound like cheating, it actually helps those who are having a tougher time memorizing techniques. Encourage them to rely on others less and less as they get more confident.

Whatever you do, don't embarrass them in front of the class. You don't want to destroy the benefits you are gaining, do you?



Step four:

The instant the technique is finished, you count slowly to two in your head — you want a two second pause, from the end of the technique.

On the two second mark, you repeat the technique in front of the class, or if you are working on your own, you see whether you were right or not after two seconds.

Note: Wouldn't it be great if you could set up a slide projector with a four second pause between changing slides. Then you'd list the techniques on a poster board on the wall. You'd do the techniques in the order of the slide show. After you performed each technique, you'd have about a two second pause before the slide revealed how you did. Just a thought.



So, if you were practicing for kata memorization, you'd call out the first move, by name — or you could just say "next move." Then you'd give your hand signal — or verbal cue.

The students perform the technique.

Pause two seconds, then perform the correct technique.

Then say, "Next move!." And you repeat the process.

It takes longer to go through the form, but the added memory benefits to your students will be worth it.

If you are practicing individual techniques, you have to refer to them by name. Or you could punch from the front, and have your students respond, as though they were reacting to your attack.

Call it a form of shadow boxing, since you are at a distance.



Confession Time:

Yes, I have used the Lozanov method on myself, utilizing all of the steps. I have tried it for foreign language instruction and martial arts memorization. I used to use it, when I was getting too caught up in the names. I wanted to be able to refer to all of the Filipino Kali techniques and positions by name.

My teacher told me, that I was too focused on the nomenclature and not enough on the proper execution of the move.

Now, here's my confession. While I have taught my students to relax before we perform certain sequences, and I have used the two-second pause before demonstrating the technique, I haven't yet incorporated the music element into my own martial arts classes.

I intend to this year.

And I will be sure to update this chapter — I report on the results. I'll compare both ways and see if there really is a difference in effectiveness of memorization.



5

Relax Your Way to Perfect Techniques (A Modified Lozanov Method)

In the last chapter, you saw the basic principles of Suggestopedia (The Lozanov Method) applied to technique memorization in the martial arts. I incorporated these principles into my own classes, and I have always been happy with the results.

You can also use the method for perfection of technique.

The same rules mentioned in the last chapter still apply:

*Relax the students

- * Play music that hits the 60 beats per minute mark
- * If you have a full class, link the performance of the technique to a signal, so everyone executes the move at the same time
- * Wait two seconds before you model the technique for them (or until you watch the slide)



Instead of offering them the chance to stretch their memories, or yours, if you are working alone — try modifying the method yet again to help in the perfection of the technique to mastery.

I affectionately call this the sandwich exercise.



I am sure you have seen this tactic employed in other areas of life — but we'll add the suggestopedia touches, to make the exercise even stronger.

Let's take the martial arts class as an example.

You perform the technique. Then your students copy you. Then you perform the technique again.

Just those three steps can make a difference in developing mastery of a move.

Now, here's the way to make it even more effective:

You sandwich the students behavior between models of the technique properly executed. If you are working alone, you have to provide examples of the model behavior — with videos or maybe in your mind, if you don't have a more objective source.

You start by relaxing your students. Then you play the appropriate music in the background.

While the music is going, you perform the technique to be mirrored

several times. Have your students focus on what you are doing.

Now, the exercise begins:

- 1) You model the technique once
- 2) Give your signal to have the students copy you, to the best of their ability
- 3) As soon as they finish, you pause for two seconds
- 4) Then you model the technique again
- 5) They visualize themselves doing the motions correctly, based on your most recent performance of the move. How long should they visualize? Two seconds.
- 6) After your two-second wait, you do the same technique again.
- 7) You give the signal for the students to begin.
- 8) They repeat the movement
- 9) You wait another two seconds before the post performance.
- 10) They visualize ...

And so it goes.



I realize this is different from doing a set of kicks along with your students. I normally do the exercises with my students, occasionally correcting a student here or there. And yes, my students improve, by sheer repetition.

This is a different kind of exercise. You are working toward precision.

As in using the technique for memorization, the whole process works much better, if you explain the whys and the how-to of the exercise ahead of time.

Teach them how to visualize. Tell them what kind of improvement you are looking for. Praise them, when you see results.

When I am working on my own, I use this exercise to improve my precision, when I am doing a speed technique.

I perform the technique several times slowly, with exacting precision.

Then I visualize myself doing the technique almost faster than the eye can see.

Then I try to imitate what I pictured in my mind.

I wait two seconds, then I visualize the proper technique again.

Then I compare the two in my head for another two seconds.

I keep visualizing the technique done correctly, and I sandwich the performance in between to visualizations.

I do this, until the performance starts matching the exemplary, imaginary move.



Don't use this for all of your practice sessions. Just add it to your bag of tricks. Know that you have an effective way to achieve a higher level of mastery in yourself and your students.



6

So, How Do You Relax?

All of these suggestions sound great, but what if you don't know how to get the alpha brain waves to kick in?

How do you achieve a level of relaxation?

The Hi-Tech Method

If only these methods were available several hundred years ago! Just imagine

Anyway, head down to your local electronics store and pick up a biofeedback machine. If you can find a machine to measure the brain waves, great. Maybe you'll have to measure your heart rate. Or you could get a cheap lie detector to measure galvanic skin response.

The you hook yourself up to the machine.

And just start imagining different pictures in your mind, until you produce the desired result.

What is the result?

Biofeedback is giving you feedback on what your body is doing. This can be in the form of a sound, or a meter with a needle. It could be LED lights on a panel. You need some way to see what's going on.

Let's say you have your finger attached to a Lie Detector Machine. You hear a high-pitched sound emitting from the speaker. You think of an argument you got in with a friend, last week. The pitch goes up. You imagine giving the speech you prepared for next week.

The pitch goes even higher. Definitely not good.

Then you imagine blue skies and green grass. The pitch drops to a low buzz. Good.

Your goals is to drop that sound as far as possible.

Books have been written on the subject and countless studies have been performed. Here, you are only getting a few paragraphs on the subject.

Keep this in mind — once you can lower that pitch on command, you can calm yourself in any situation.

Some people practice spending their whole lives in that relaxed state.



Mental Movies, Slides, and Creative Visualization

Blue skies and green meadows, eh? Maybe you don't need a bio-feedback device to help you. Relaxing could be as easy as finding the right mental image.

What calms you?

Are you playing a mental movie of this image, or do you have it up on your mental screen, like a slide?

For me, I see the North Fork of the Willamette River. I hear the rush of the water. I smell the fresh, summer flowers, and the smell of fresh water, and cool, moss-covered rocks. I see blue skies and green trees.

I am lying on a rock, without a care in the world.

When the sun gets too hot, I take a slow dive into the almost too cold water. I open my eyes under water and see the trout swimming, on occasion. The silence of being under water, further relaxes me.

Then I am back out on the rock. I sunbathe

This is my image. It works for me. It immediately calms me. It works on all levels — I imagine sights, sounds, even smells and the touch of the cool water or the warmth of the summer sun.

I can immediately drop my heart rate with this image.

By the way — half the fun in this way of relaxing is finding the image that works for you.



More Imagery Techniques — Elevators and Colors

I have read about “Elevator Imagery” being used for relaxation, meditation, and even self hypnosis.

You shut your eyes and imagine yourself in an elevator.

Note: If you are claustrophobic, maybe you could see an escalator in your mind ... wait, if you are afraid of heights, that won't work either ... how about a good, old-fashioned staircase?

The self talk might go something like this:

I enter the elevator. I feel the rush of the busy day.

As the doors close, I leave the outside world behind.

I take the elevator down one floor. Some of the daily stress stays on the floor above.

I go down one more floor. The muscles in my neck start to relax. I really am leaving it all behind. No worries down here — all is right.

One more floor. I am beginning to feel an inner peace in my body. My heart is slowing; my body is relaxing.

As I get closer and closer to the bottom, I feel really calm, cool, and collected. It's a pleasant, quiet, relaxed feeling.

I am at the bottom. The doors to the elevator open. I am in a comfortable, safe place. I am in control of my emotions, my body, myself....



Do you get the idea of how this self-talk goes?

I don't talk out loud when I visualize, but you could. You could even record your own voice — speaking in a calm, quiet fashion, and then play it back to yourself.

Some folks use color to imagine themselves relaxing — sometimes combined with elevator talk. They start with bold, vibrant colors. They work their way through a spectrum arriving at peaceful, relaxing hues.

After spending time in this relaxed state, many feel you should reverse the process. You need to go back up the elevator to the real world — your self talk should be more on the lines of being prepared for anything, becoming energized and awake. Calmly being able to handle any emergency with ease.

You get the idea.



Every Breath You Take

Another way to calm yourself is with breathing exercises. Again there are many ways, theories, and exercises concerning breathing correctly.

In just a couple of sentences, here's how I would go about it:

- 1) Breathe from the diaphragm — fill the tummy from the bottom up.
No shallow, top-breathing allowed.
- 2) Inhale for a count of six.
- 3) Hold is for a count of six.
- 4) exhale for a count of six.

I prefer to inhale with my nose and exhale with my mouth. I know others who do the exact opposite. The way I do it matches how folks breathe when they lift weights.

Slowing the body down by breathing also seems to have a calming effect on the mind. Do it for five minutes and see if you feel calmer.

Note: No hyperventilating allowed ;-)

There is another excellent way to relax



7

Bruce Lee's Way to Relax

Actually, it was Bruce Lee's way to stretch. I have read and heard that Bruce Lee used to stretch before he got out of bed in the morning. Also, he did the same routine when he went to bed.

He likened it to watching animals in nature. Have you ever seen a dog or cat get up from sleeping? What's the first thing they do?

That's right — a complete body stretch.

It just so happens that this is another technique to relax.

You progressively tense and relax each muscle group. Believe it or not, tensing is a great way to relax.

As a quick experiment, look at your hand. Either one is fine. Now tell it to relax. Physically will your hand to relax.

If you and I are at all similar, you are probably having a hard time producing a difference in your hand. It probably feels about the same.

Now, let's do the Bruce Lee method. Open your hand, so your fingers are sticking straight out. Now tense your hand — all of the muscles, from the palm all the way out to the finger tips. Really stretch and tense those fingers — straighten them out.

Hold that tense position, still trying to tense even more, for a slow count of ten.

Now relax your hand. Shake it out. Let all of the tenseness flow out of it. Shake your hand out. Loosen it up.

Does it feel more relaxed than the first way? It should.

This progressive tensing is an excellent way to relax your muscles and mind:

- 1) First tense both your feet. Tense the toes. Hold it for a count of ... well, you decide how long to hold it. I use about 10-15 seconds. Then let go — relax.
- 2) Next you tense your legs. I tense mine so much, they practically lift off the bed (or floor). If you are practicing this progressive tensing while standing, which is a bit more difficult, your legs practically push your feet through the floor. Don't forget to relax at the end of the count.
- 3) From the legs, you move up to the torso of your body. Tense it all, including the chest — don't give yourself a heart attack. Slowly tense — then relax.
- 4) Next, tense your arms. My arm tensing is very similar to my leg tensing. I tense to the point that my arms almost shake from being so tense. I can really feel the difference when I relax my arms after tensing. Maybe I am better with my arms.
- 5) I finish the routine by tensing my shoulder, neck and head.



Use the above as an alternate way to relax. You can pair it up with the learning methods, use it as a warm up before a full stretch routine, begin with a stretch before working out, or use it to begin your day.

Special Note:

I have a recommendation for our auditory learners — those who learn best by hearing — the folks who love to listen to a good story, for example.

Talk yourself through the process.

As you tense your feet you might say to yourself (out-loud isn't necessary):

I am beginning my relaxation routine. I am relaxing my entire body.

You move up to the legs and continue:

As I release the tension in my body, I also release all the pent up tensions of the outside world.

I am tensing my body (now, the torso), and then I let the tension and my worries flow out of my body.

My arms feel so relaxed. My body feels relaxed. I am almost ready to learn — to practice martial arts.

As you finish off with your shoulders, neck , and head, you might say:

My body is relaxed. My mind is functioning at its peak. My body wants to learn— it craves performing each technique with precision. My mind will remember the best that I accomplish today. I will be able to replicate my improved techniques at a moment's notice.

It has been proven that talking yourself through a relaxation exercise can have more benefit than just going through the motions.

As I said before, you can sub-vocalize. I find it's more effective than choosing my words out loud. I have also heard of folks recording their vocal directions into a tape recorder ...

Tense your feet. Really stretch them out. Now hold that for a count of ten. Slowly, one ... twoFeel the tightness in your muscles fade away....

8

Slow Down Now To Speed Up Later

Learning a new technique?

Slow it down.

Working on your latest form or kata?

Take it slow and easy.

How slowly should you practice?

You probably won't like the answer.

You should practice so painfully slow that you barely see the limb performing the technique move at all. I am not kidding.

As an example, once many moons ago or, at least fifteen years ago, my teacher had all of us perform the first form from wing chun, sil lum tao.

The only catch? We had to do it at his pace. It took us two full hours to go through the form once.

Let me repeat that. Two Full Hours — Once through!

We were allowed to shake out our muscles when they cramped, then we had to go right back into the form, from whenever we paused.

Does that seem like a waste of time to you? Was I paying all this money, just to cramp up my muscles with impractical practice?

What's the point of slow practice? After all, aren't we going to fight at full speed, if confronted by an attacker?

Before I answer that, let me tell you a little story. It's true....



In 1982, after I had been with my teacher for a couple of years, I noticed that my techniques didn't work as well for me as the same techniques did for the more advanced students.

I couldn't figure it out. They seemed to work most of the time against my college buddies. When we practiced, I was able to win a majority of the time — not always, but often.

But back at class, things fell apart.

The other students didn't go along with the move the way many students cooperate too much in some other martial arts schools. These moves should have worked, but they didn't against my brethren.

So, I asked why.,

After Steve Golden analyzed what I was doing, he told me that I needed to develop more precision.

I thought I was performing the moves just fine. Obviously, I wasn't.

As I worked on precision, I noticed that my seniors had the same kinds of problems against Steve. It was the same problem at a higher level of mastery.



Throughout the years, there has been a lot to be said for learning to perform the move exactly as it should be. Sure you have to modify according to circumstance — yet there is an optimum distance, where the physics of the body come into play. Proper extension matters. Having the correct tension or lack thereof in the limb performing the move is of paramount importance.

It all matters.



So, what's the point of practicing in a slow, relaxed manner?

Answer: You learn precision.

Think of it this way — you are starting with a mostly level playing field, when you begin to train. Your muscles don't know how to fight in a stylized precise manner.

Sure, you react instinctively, but you have no formal training to improve your odds — you hope.

You have nerves and muscles that don't yet know the trained action; you lack muscle memory.

Maybe you even trained or practiced incorrectly. So, worse than a level playing field, you react incorrectly in a fight situation.

Either way, you have some training, or untraining, to do.

I keep emphasizing — precision will take you a long way in the arts — most seasoned martial artists will agree with me.

So, why not treat your body to precise practice. You keep performing the technique, or form over and over — ever so slowly.

You begin to wear grooves into that leveled playing field.

Keep practicing slowly. Do this beyond the point of boredom.

Eventually those grooves become trenches ... deep trenches.

And they get deeper with time.

You want those trenches so deep, your muscles and nerves so well trained, that when you have to do the technique at full speed your body will move in a precise manner.

Your body won't know how to check at the wrong angle. The distance between your hand and your body will be exact.

Your stance won't accidentally go too wide.

So, how long do you have to practice slowly?

My ratio is about 10:1

I practice my form ten times at a slow pace — no, not once in two hours — more like once through in ten minutes. Then about once every two weeks, I practice the form at full speed.

Just think, if you practice one form a day for three years, you will have trained your muscle memory over 1,000 times.



End note:

I like fast moves as much as the next person. I love snapping out fast back fists. A snap kick to the groin delights me Ñ as long as itÕs not ÔmyÕ groin.

Practicing speed techniques is absolutely essential to my brand of martial arts.

But at the learning stage of any technique, to help my body to learn. I practice slowly.



9

Tensing Before Impact

Have you ever seen a muscle-bound hulk punch?

More often than not, they tense their punches all the way through the movement. Not all of them, but the majority do.

In my opinion, the ones who stay relaxed until the instant before impact ... must have learned from a competent teacher.

Tensing all the way through the punch definitely slows down the punch. Any decent martial artist can tell you that. But how do you know exactly when to tense?

The key is to break the entire punch into stages for examination. Once we find the place to start tensing, we can practice keeping the rest of the punch fluid and fast.

Before we break the punch into its component parts, let's look at the punch as a whole. It doesn't matter whether you are performing a vertical punch or a horizontal punch, the principles are the same.

I think it was Ed Parker, the founder of Modern Kempo, who likened a good punch to a whipping motion. That's a great analogy.

Think about it. You send the whip out in the air — it picks up speed as it progresses through its motion — at the very end the tip gets snapped tightly and quickly.

This is a good way to look at a punch. You want to get your punch out there quickly, and you need tension only at the very end. You need that tensing motion at the end — it makes for a more powerful punch, but the muscles don't tense too early and slow down the beginning motion.

You also don't want to break every bone in your hand. You need to tense at some point for protection.

Let's look at the various stages:



Stage One:

You could start with your closed fist cradled under your arm, at your side, or you could begin with a gung fu punch that starts with the fist at the inside bend of the opposite elbow.

I use the latter. I think that punching from the side of the body is too great a distance. And I don't feel I lose any power by using a vertical punch, beginning from a closer distance to my target.

It's always your choice.

Just make sure when your punch starts, it heads forward, toward your target. Heading backwards to cradle at the beginning of a punch is just this side of ludicrous.

After all, why bother learning to punch with relaxed speed, if you waste time going in the opposite direction from your attacker?

Punch forward from the very beginning. Begin the punch from the point you wish to move forward.

At this stage, you want your arm and hand relaxed. Your hand isn't open — it stays closed in a punch position, yet it's still relaxed.



Stage Two:

Think of someone pulling your punch out there from in front of you. That's the feeling you want.

Or go back to the whip analogy, You want to whip your punch forward, still maintaining good form.

At this stage, before the halfway point, you are still completely relaxed. You haven't even begun to tighten your muscles.



Stage Three:

You are now beyond the halfway point. Your punch probably won't pick up much more speed. It should be moving like lightning by now.

I notice that a lot of martial artists start tensing at this point.

You could — I still feel it slows down the overall punch.

I would hold off as long as possible



Stage Four:

Your punching hand is about an inch or two from impact. Now is the time to tense, and drive the punch home as you make impact.

Now is the time for power. Now is the time to have your fist tightly packed, so you don't crush your fingers upon impact.



Stage Five:

BAM!



One Way to Get the Proper Feeling

You could practice punching a heavy bag, to get the proper feeling. You could try your luck n a makiwara pad. A sand bag against the wall works too.

Here's how I teach beginners the feeling of when to tense:

Hold your punching hand open, in front of your body, somewhere between your belly and your sternum (chest).

Have your hand open, fingers relaxed. My wrist is bent inward a little.

Position your target hand also in front of your body, about six inches from the striking hand. The target hand is also open — your palm will serve as the target.

With the striking hand relaxed, you punch the open palm of the target hand. It's the same motion as creating a pocket by punching into a baseball mitt.

If you start with your punching hand open, fingers relaxed, and you end with the same hand tightly closed into a fist, you will start to get the correct feel.

Be sure to tighten your fist, or you could hurt your fingers.

Now, all you have to do is generalize this fist pounding into your palm to a real punch, with the proper distances.

Good punching!



10

If you were only allowed to tense one spot ...

OK, we know to practice our forms slowly. We know to tense a hair before impact. But what should you tense while doing the slow forms?

Do you relax the whole body, so you're as formless as a wet noodle?

Should we flex our muscles, like an actor imitating martial arts experts?

What I am about to recommend is a great way to think during practice. Personally, my mind is on other things during an actual encounter, whether it be during practice or a real self-defense situation.

When I go through a form slowly, I think to myself:

If I were only allowed to tense one part of my body during a particular technique in the form, which part would I tense?

What I am trying to do is to keep my body relaxed, still with good form — but I am also trying to give my technique the proper energy — the proper feeling, during practice.

I check to the side ... maybe my palm is tense, but the rest of the arm is relaxed.

I check with my fingers up and open ... maybe my point of tension is the edge of the hand, below the pinky finger.

I strike to the side, with a back fist ... my triceps tense, but my biceps are relaxed.

In a real fight, the tension in the body is constantly changing, constantly adapting to the situation.

During slow practice, we have the luxury of emphasizing just one point for tension.

This isn't necessarily an easy tip to follow. Sometimes it's hard to imagine keeping in one part of the arm tense and the other part of the same arm loose and relaxed.

Believe me, it's worth the effort.

By thinking this way, and practicing this way now, you will improve your martial precision later when it's needed.

So, which part of your body will you tense?



11

Tension Telegraphs

After so many years of training with Steve Golden, I am hypersensitive to telegraphing. So many martial arts do some little wasted motion to let their opponent or attacker know exactly what they are about to do, or precisely when they are about to move. These extra motions precede the action.

Well, there are several telegraphs that are tension related.

In my humble opinion, you can almost stereotype the martial artist by his or her telegraph. For example:

Pure Beginner

Sometimes the weapon 'hand or foot' about to attack you is so wound up with tension, it starts to shake. This little, and sometimes big, vibration is a big 'tell.' Your opponent's muscles tense so much that the arm almost shakes with pent up energy.

It's just waiting to attack.

Note: Of course, beware the person who uses these telegraphs as a fake or a feint. If your opponent has enough skill to subtly fake, you are NOT dealing with a rank amateur.



Still a Beginner

Another telegraph made by beginner with 'some' training is a shoulder tense. The shoulder tenses right before the strike. You might see the shoulder lift just a bit. It's a barely perceptible lean with the shoulder.

This type of telegraph gives you just enough time to predict what's coming.

In some of the progressive arts, I see this telegraph right before the punch or strike is made with the arm attached to the shoulder telegraphing.

In some of the classical arts, I see the shoulder tension made with the opposite arm. Call it a mini-pull back before the other side of the body attacks.

Remember, the person who telegraphs with the shoulder may have had some martial arts training, but is still in the early stage of instruction in his or her art.



An Intermediate Telegraph

Once you have been at a good school long enough, you learn not to telegraph by tensing the shoulder. Your teacher (sensei, guro, sifu, etc.) has corrected this telegraph over and over.

It has finally sunk in.

So, what happens in this intermediate stage?

Some mid-level martial artists telegraph by consciously relaxing their shoulders right before the attack. It's almost funny. They are told not to tense their shoulders — so , they make a mental note to relax the shoulders.

We can pick up in this little telegraph. You see a slight drop of the shoulder before the strike.

Make use of these shoulder movements to improve your reaction time.



Advanced Telegraphs

By the time a practitioner of the arts has been at it for a year, many of the tension telegraphs vanish. They learn. They progress.

We have to look for cues other than tension telegraphs.

What are these telegraphs?

Sorry, that's not the subject of this eBooklet.

Relax — I may deal with the subject in another book ... someday.

End note:

Remember not to be faked by a false telegraph. On the flip side Ñ now you have a few tension-relaxation fakes that you can try on someone else.



12

Secret Relaxation Tip

In the book, [Wrist Locks: From Protecting Yourself to Becoming an Expert](#), I talk about *The Point of No Return*. This is the spot where the wrist lock can no longer be countered. Your opponent doesn't have a chance. The lock is too strong, the angle is too deep for your attacker to counter, even with a punch or a kick.

The pain is just too great.

I go into a lot more detail in the book. You also get ways to use this point to your advantage, and how to know when you have reached that point in the lock you are effecting.

But what if the shoe were on the other foot? What if your opponent were to put a lock on you? What if you just hit the point of no return on you?

The pain is strong enough that you can't counter. Now what do you do?



Well, you could fake the point of no return by tensing early. You convince your attacker that you have reached your limit of motion a little early. Then you relax as you punch back, or reverse the lock — or both.

The problem is some more advanced wrist lock artists look for this resistance. It's exactly what they want — even if you plan on counter-ing. The tension causes your attacker to move to the next phase of his (or her) attack.

But what if you had a way to actually extend your point of no return?

What if you could go a bit past where your opponent thought you were stuck?

And what if you could do this secret technique without telegraphing your intention by tensing at the point of pain?

The answer to your wishes is in the art of relaxation. Really.

It's natural for the body to tense as it feels pain. Bodies naturally tense as we reach the Point of No Return.

But by relaxing the arm and wrist, I can gain a bigger range of motion.

Here's how I started to practice for this tactic:

I had my wife put on a basic wrist lock. She put it on until I couldn't stand the pain. When I reached my limit, I consciously relaxed my wrist and arm.

She was able to continue the motion for almost another 10 -12 inches. This added range would give me extra time to react, to counter a lock.

Now that I am used to loosening up as I counter, I am trying to learn to stay relaxed all the way through. Sure, I could fake by tensing at that point like the first tactic in this chapter, but I'd rather learn how to continue on in the motion without tensing.

The key is to stay relaxed. With relaxation, you gain extra time. A little improved flexibility wouldn't hurt either — maybe it's time to stretch those wrists.



Product Update

I am very proud of the eBook **Secrets of Teaching Martial Arts More Effectively**. And I was going to use this space to talk about all of its features and benefits -- the innovative ways it helps martial-arts teachers to improve.

I wanted to explain the many ways students learn at faster rate, when their teachers apply these principles.

To my surprise, **The New Punch Papers** is outselling **Secrets of Teaching**... by more than a 3:1 ratio.

It's amazing.

I poured all of my experience of over 14 years of high-school and college teaching into **Secrets of Teaching Martial Arts More Effectively**.

Yet everyone is buying a collection of articles on punching. Sure, they are great articles -- and **you get over 40 articles (162 pages)**, but I am still shocked by its popularity.

Why?

Because I sent surveys to a list of martial artists -- over 2,000 of them. And the vote came back. Over 90% of them wanted more informatin on helping their students to learn at a faster rate.

So, I wrote a book on some of the best methods to teach martial arts.

And everyone is buying **The Punch Papers**.

Oh well.



Find out more about [The New Punch Papers](#)

Or make this martial artist happy and...

Read about the [Secrets of Teaching Martial Arts More Effectively](#).