

# Martial Art Consumer

The Most Important Questions You Should Ask of Any  
Martial Arts Instructor Before You Sign Up For  
Anything &

Case Study 001: How to Choose a Martial Arts School

# Awareness Guide



*INSIDER'S SECRETS  
to finding a GREAT martial arts  
and Self-Development  
Program, plus Helpful  
Tips and Insights  
to Increase Your  
Safety NOW!*

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# **Martial Arts Insider Secret #5**

## **The most important questions you should ask of any martial arts instructor before you sign up for anything!**

This is a quick guide to help you evaluating a martial arts program and instructor before you make any commitments.

At the end of this section is a questionnaire for you to print out and take with you on a visit to a martial arts school to ask some very pointed questions about their program.

Let's walk through it together, and I'll point out some important factors to consider!

### **School Data**

This is just a record of the school so you can contact them and/or do additional research online. Typically, you'll know if your comfortable after your first visit and any extra research just helps to "seal the deal."

### **Facility**

This is for you to evaluate the facility, itself. Do you feel comfortable being there? This is important because you'll be spending a lot of time there over the next few years if this is the right program for you, your family, or your child(ren). Assuming you attend class twice a week, in a year that's around 100 classes!

### **Instructors**

This is for evaluating the instructors, their background and training.

The # of instructors is not super critical, but more than 1 is always a good sign of a healthy program that's developing leaders who are capable of assisting with classes. An instructor who's been teaching for years but is still doing everything himself or herself isn't doing a very good job in developing or retaining students, a definite warning sign of a not-so-great program.

The best student-to-teacher ratio is around 10-to-1 or less. This can be accomplished by junior students working with senior students, or assistant instructors. It's entirely possible for a high-quality program to be run with the bulk of the intermediate level classes being led by senior students or assistant instructors, under the guidance of the Master Instructor, but there should ALWAYS be a trained instructor on the floor, overseeing the classes and making adjustments – giving all students a few minutes of personal time and attention. It might seem strange at first, to see seniors assisting in classes with their juniors, but that can often be a great sign – it means there's an actual path for juniors to follow as they become seniors to work on developing their communication and people reading skills, which are so very important for self-defense situations BEFORE things get physical.

Training for instructors should include training in the martial arts being taught at the school (of course!), but also include training in basic safety and CPR, classroom management skills, communication skills, motivation strategies, learning styles, and positive behavioral guidance and redirection skills. The best schools should NEVER use negative reinforcement – belittling students in public, calling students stupid or “maggots,” abusive physical practices (such as children doing knuckle pushups on a hardwood floor, or adult instructors hitting children with a stick at full force)... *all examples I've seen in horribly run schools, by the way!*

Continuing education should happen at LEAST once a month. The best schools train their instructors weekly!

And finally, instructors should be taken through a progressive, or step-by-step, process from assisting with classes, to being trained, to being given portions of classes, to running a full class under the guidance of the Head Instructor or Master Instructor, to teaching intermediate level students, to finally teaching basic students... which gives many opportunities for learning “on-the-job” but not simply dropping the instructor into a new situation without any clue. It should take a few months to train an instructor at a minimum, and instructors should be senior ranked students with 3-6 months of experience in assisting classes before teaching classes solo on a regular basis.

## **Parents/Family**

This section is for connecting with the Parents and/or Family of active students.

You should be allowed to speak with other families currently in the program. The best schools actively encourage it. And in the VERY BEST schools, the families will introduce themselves to you without any prompting because they are so excited to see a potentially new member of the school.

Talk with the families – get their experiences: good, bad, and sideways. Ask them about the good things they’ve seen in their own students, and in other students. Ask them about challenges they’ve seen in the school, and how the school/staff/members handled the challenge. Ask about how the school addresses students looking for the same types of goals you’re looking to accomplish.

The best schools encourage involvement from families – from volunteering around the school and in community events, to enrolling in the program. The more engaged you are as a family with what’s happening in your martial arts school, the better the results you will achieve for yourself and for your student.

The instructor or program director should be able to outline a specific series of steps to address your concern, provide examples of success with families that have experienced similar challenges, and give you a sense of certainty that they know what they are doing. If you feel like they are “winging” their answers just to get a sale, they probably are...!

## **The Program**

This section is for evaluating the program offered.

The primary purpose of martial arts... this is \*THE\* question about the program... and answers will vary.

For some schools, it’s all about the violence of fighting. For other schools, it’s about personal development – physical, mental, and emotional fitness, leadership skills, and developing positive character – using martial arts as the process.

The best schools focus on the development of the person, even in full-contact fighting gyms. For you, or your child, to be successful in a martial arts program, the primary purpose of the school you are visiting **MUST** be in alignment with your goals.

For example: if YOU want a happy, healthy, safe, wealthy, and wise child but the instructor of this school feels that the primary purpose of martial arts is to have the personal power to smash any and all other human beings to dare to possess a difference of opinion (*unfortunately, something I’ve actually experienced*)... you’re going to have a fundamental difference of opinion, and never be happy with this program, and the outcomes it delivers.

The best schools are active in their community, supporting local events and have been recognized by their community.

The length of time will vary, but for younger schools – ask how long the instructor worked or volunteered at his or her instructor’s school. You should also ask about the instructor’s relationship with his or her instructor. If they have “broken away” – that should suggest to you there might be a loyalty issue in the larger organization, and it’s difficult for an instructor to teach a skill such as loyalty when they don’t demonstrate it or live it in their own life.

A school that has been running for more than a 5 years should have produced Black Belts or Black Sashes in that timeframe; if not, you should ask why. If the instructor blames the students for a lack of motivation, that’s a warning sign that this might not be the program for you.

The best schools track student report cards and accomplishments – children AND adults, and recognize those accomplishments in front of others.

Sparring is often a touchy subject, but the best programs will help you understand why they do it, how it benefits their students, and understand that it’s a PART of the overall experience, not the sole focus of the program. Safety gear should always be used – especially in the beginning. Advanced students might not use as much as beginners, but let’s be realistic – everybody has to work tomorrow (kids have school, adults have jobs)... so no injuries is a good thing! Ask about the # of injuries in the school, the type, and severity. If they brag about knockouts, broken bones, dislocated shoulders or fingers.... Unless you’re looking to see how “teh h4rdc0r3” you are (a hardcore fighting only focused program, hellbent on the violence one human being can perform on another), this is definitely a warning sign!

The best schools have a quality assurance process – example include:

- The curriculum should be well-established, written down and given to students
- Videos should be available online
- Students should be required to meet specific standards that are tracked (on a form, on line, on the belt/sash)
- Students should be tested on a regular, established basis (generally every 2 or 3 months)
- Students have guidelines for ways to meet minimum standards, and are encouraged to excel over and above those standards

Forms of communication should include as many methods as possible.

## Tuition

This section is for understanding and evaluating the program's tuition.

When it comes to tuition for a martial arts program, there are 3 factors to consider: *The Price*, *The Costs*, and *The Opportunity Cost*

- **The Price** – this is the money to enroll, which is typically a down payment and monthly tuition
- **The Costs** – this includes all the incidentals such as uniform fee, test fee, belt fee, annual organization dues, workshop and seminar fees, competition/tournament fees, travel to and from the school, and any other fees they forget to mention
- **The Opportunity Cost** – this includes comparing this martial arts program and its outcomes to any and every other available opportunity available to your family.
  - *For example*, suppose you want your son to develop better social skills and enroll him in 5 different activities to achieve that outcome such as: a club at school, a sport, hire a tutor, hire a personal trainer, and do martial arts but aren't seeing the social skills development happening with the club at school, in the sport, with the tutor, or with the personal training but you are see that he's starting to become more confident and more comfortable at speaking to and with others in martial arts, you should seriously consider the time, money and energy invested by your family into the other 4 activities for the time being. Which activities are truly delivering the outcome you wish?

In the best schools, monthly tuition is range from \$150 to \$300 a month for one person, and about double that for an entire family. As a point of comparison in prices:

- Martial Arts: \$150 to \$300/month for an individual, \$300 to \$600 for a family
- Personal Training: \$50 to \$75 per hour, about \$400 to \$600 a month
- Tutoring: \$25 an hour to \$1,500 a letter grade in 6 weeks
- Youth Sports: Free to \$400-600 /month at the elite level (plus hiring a personal trainer)
- Therapy: \$25/hr to \$400/month
- Family Vacation: free to thousands of dollars

In the best schools, two forms of programs are offered: Basic Classes and training for Black Belt/Sash and Beyond. These two programs often include different levels of service, with the Basic Program functioning as more of an a la cart approach while the upgraded programs to Black Belt/Sash and Beyond are more of an all-inclusive approach with more advanced material offered, plus opportunities to learn and integrate knowledge and develop skill faster than in a Basic Program.

The simple truth is that training to the level Black Belt/Sash in knowledge and skill takes several years to achieve and the best schools are selective about who is allowed into the higher levels of training. Basic programs are designed to train the fundamentals of martial arts, provide value, allow students and the school to evaluate each other for a long-term relationship, and assure that values and outcomes align.

Moving from a Basic Program to a Black Belt/Sash and Beyond program is very much like **Courtship Before Marriage!** Courtship is all about discovering aligned values, vision, and mission before making a long-term commitment.

Schools that attempt to enroll every student into advanced programs with no process of evaluation tend to be focused on money over quality, and charge a lower tuition to get the school as large as possible. Schools that have a qualification process for advanced programs tend to be focused on quality over money, and charge at a higher tuition to assure that only the most motivated students and families are in the advanced programs because the values and outcomes are aligned.

Always keep in mind that cost and value are two VERY different things. Anyone can charge a low tuition, but not everyone can provide a high quality program. Personally, I've seen high cost with high value, high cost with low value, and low cost with low value but I have never seen low cost with high value. In every case I've ever seen, the highest value instructors – unless they are financially independent – tend to charge at the middle-to-higher price points.

Ultimately, the decision rests with you – regardless of tuition level, so long as you are clear on what you are expected to pay and it fits your budget, your primary consideration is the value, quality, and outcomes of the program for you, or your family:

- Do the values, mission, and vision of this school match to yours?
- Do you like the Instructor, staff, other students, and families?
- Do you feel they like you?
- Do you want to have these people in your life for anywhere from a year to six years?

If you can answer yes, then you just might have found the perfect program for yourself, or your family... Congratulations!

## Case Study 001: On Choosing a Good Martial Arts School Near You

I was recently asked, “*How do you choose a good martial arts school in your area? How do I separate the ones that are good and passionate like you from the ones that are just doing it for the money and giving away belts easily?*”

Here’s my answer:

To find a good martial arts school isn’t too difficult:

- 1) Go in for more information – calling is useless and meaningless other than to find a good time to visit. You can’t get a good feel for the place just by calling – or a good feel for the attitudes of the other students/families without going in yourself. Professional schools will most likely set an appointment with you so that they can spend some time getting to know you, your family, and the unique reasons you’re interested in the martial arts and improving your life.
- 2) Ask for a trial membership if they don’t offer you one – I offer 2 free weeks; most good schools do. The trial should include some 1:1 time with an instructor plus some time in group classes. If it’s a professional school, they’ll give you an offer to enroll on your 2nd class (*sometimes the first class, with a 30-day or 60-day money back guarantee*) that has a deadline generally in the first week – for example: come in Tuesday for a semi-private lesson and back again Wednesday or Thursday, with a deadline to enroll with some savings by this Saturday. Some parents call in and want to know prices right away – which is a meaningless question without knowing what you’re buying (*more on pricing below*).
- 3) You should be allowed to ask questions, meet with other students, see/hear testimonials and results from current and previous students, and watch a class – generally after your first 1:1 class or semi-private class. In my school, my Basic Orientation classes are what we call “organized chaos” with lots of things happening – designed to help focus and refocus the mind on learning and being engaged, being able to stay focused while lots of things are going on around you. Just watching it without a context can be a bit intimidating for young children with insecurities, so I always work 1:1 or semi-private first and then bring the student to a group class the 2nd time so they can experience it for themselves (*think: try before you buy and moving from shallow the end of the pool to the middle of the pool instead of jumping off the high diving board on day one at the pool*).

4) Interview the instructor – what’s his/her mission? How does he/she feel about “belt factories” in the martial arts? (*Testing on a regular schedule and passing with an A, B or C at the colored rank and passing a Black Belt test with an A average is not a belt factory. A belt factory is when you are rushed through the ranks with no understanding, no development of confidence; whenever there’s a challenge, they just gloss over it to move you forward; there’s no long-term relationship with the students. No qualification process to commit to higher level training.... it’s all “\$ first, quality second” type of atmosphere, but you won’t pick that up over the phone.*) Is there a difference between self-defense and fighting skills? (*Yes – self-defense is about staying safe and personal protection; fighting skills is about doing damage and understanding/developing the skills to stay in danger – self-defense is relatively quick to learn compared to fighting skills... self-defense should train you to reach a position of safety, leave the danger; fighting skill and submissions take a longer time to develop – skill in self-defense or fighting does not necessarily translate 1:1 from one to the other.*)

5) Do you get a good “vibe” from the place – clean, open communication, there to serve you, focused on taking care of your concerns/issues, involved in the community, other parents are happy/excited to talk to you, other students happy/excited to meet and train with you, good peer group for you/your family/your child, no interpersonal issues on the training floor or in the “peanut gallery” (*where the parents sit*)?

6) Plan what you can reasonably budget for a professional martial arts program. Realize that a well-run program helps children get off ADD/ADHD medication, can help to remove the need for therapy/counseling, improves grades, improves self-image, provides a great workout for the body/mind/emotions (*need all three running well to be happy in life*), improves confidence, improves communication skills – and can even revitalize family relationships...

Factor all that and consider this: A good personal trainer is ~\$65/hr and might give you a discount for a packaged deal... say \$50 a session for 8 sessions a month... that’s \$400/mo for personal training, and I have yet to meet a personal trainer who is focused on transferring all their knowledge into their clients (*if the trainer did that, no more clients*). A professional martial arts program should give you the knowledge and skill to know what you are doing and why you are doing it. That’s part of the Black Belt training process. The trainer is focused on improving the body and overall health – what about behavior and grades, plus family time together in a shared activity? Getting a tutor can cost anywhere from \$20 an hour to \$1,500 to raise a letter grade – which is great for improving study habits – but what about attitude, behavior, chores, health and fitness, or family together time in a shared activity? And in just these two examples, what about personal safety and protection – having the confidence to say no means no, and the knowledge, skill, and experience to back it up when someone doesn’t respect your child’s words?

A professional martial arts program should run in the neighborhood of \$150 to \$300 a month for a basic program for an individual and \$300 to \$600 for a family – once you factor in equipment, uniforms, testing, intramural tournaments, and workshops/seminars. Now, you can save some \$\$\$ by looking for a guy who's teaching at a church or in his basement/garage for close to free – or go to the Rec Center for a little more than free, but I have yet to meet world-class, highly educated anybody who does anything for free or close to free. I've seen high quality, high price; low quality, low price; and low quality, high price. As for the "I don't want to get my child excited and then find out I can't afford it" concern that many families have – that's why I wrote #6 – consider what you're willing/able to budget. If you're at the point where it's pay rent/gas/food or take martial arts – you probably have bigger issues to address first like the financial stability of your household – so a rec program or a free program at a church might be appropriate as a temporary solution. Just remember, you get what you pay for. And all that glitters is not gold. Do your homework, like reading things like this... ^\_^

If you just don't want to pay "too much" – continue reading:

Truth be told – learning the martial arts in a professional setting is about the most cost-effective thing you can do for you and your family, hands down.

Case in point:

A ) My mom fell and hit her head because she didn't know how to fall safely, suffering brain trauma and was unconscious for 3 weeks. She was in her mid-60s at the time. After 2 years of physical therapy (*total cost: \$500,000 plus her personality shifted a bit*) she will still never be able to drive because her brain can't process her body in motion and moving targets like other cars around her. =/ However, because of her injury, I developed a Falling Safely Workshop (*featured on WDTN Channel 2 News twice, in fact*). I've taught that Falling Safely workshops to people and can tell you that a family friend in her 60s has fallen four times since I trained her, once from a 3-foot ladder in her kitchen... she tore a small hole in her leg from the ladder but got up and finished making dinner, no injuries. Based on my mom's experience, this family friend saved 8 years of her life and \$2,000,000!

B ) I've been at a multi-sport event and watched a coach reduce a competitive cheerleading team member who was 6 years old to tears because the 6-year-old was "an eighth of an inch too fat to compete" – and after doing some research found out that competitive cheerleading (*and dance and gymnastics*) can cost upwards of \$6,000 to \$8,000 a year; most young ladies compete for an average of 3–5 years (*so that's \$15,000 to \$40,000 total investment*), and many end up with eating disorders, a value system based on external validation and the approval of others.

And once a young lady's hormones are messed up, it negatively impacts ability to conceive children and long-term bone density. To me, that is expensive. Plus, some of the parents have horrible attitudes, too – do you want to pay to have them influence your children – and their children put social pressure on your children to conform to “the program”? Peer pressure has more influence than parenting skills, especially as children mature.

C ) If you had the opportunity to learn the skills to protect yourself or your family, and you didn't... what's the life of your child worth to you – an abduction, a rape, a murder, but you saved \$50/mo, or \$100/mo...? I've had students drop out of the program because the families couldn't figure out how to save any additional money... but the parents still smoked, still had their wine, still had their Starbucks.... \*shakes my head\* With the families I help, I know that they see the value of their children as a resounding **VALUE BEYOND PRICE**, and in the families I serve, the parents would give up their own lives to protect their children. There is a difference between learning self-defense and learning fighting skills – self-defense is about doing whatever is necessary to get to a position of safety, while fighting skills are developed to stay in danger. You want to find a program that understands that difference and does self-defense training in a safe but sometimes in unexpected way – eyes closed, low light, multiple attackers.

I have students who started as children and are now adults – who are in college on massive scholarships, students who were anti-social who are now well-adjusted missionaries – and I know I personally transformed from an angry, manipulative, resentful, arrogant teenager into a leader, a motivator, an encourager, a person who loves to serve and expand and light up everyone he meets. Now, I've been training for over 24 years – throughout the US and internationally including China, Hong Kong, Korea, Brazil, and Canada. I'm a national and international champion and a published author, have multiple certifications, and have spent close to \$250,000 on my education in the martial arts... but so what? That's what I've done to develop myself and dig out of the hole I was in for about 20 years. What's more important is this: can I (or someone like me) add value to your life and the life of your child/family and help you to achieve the goals you have for yourself and your child/family, and do you like the way I plan on going about it? Personally, my life is about helping others to be Happy, Healthy, Safe, Wealthy, and Wise. I'm on a mission to light up the world, one family at a time.

Find an instructor who's more than willing to spend the time and sit with you and explain what he does and how his school operates – you should be able to feel his passion, his commitment, his vision. Maybe he even has a YouTube channel with more information (like <http://www.YouTube.com/KungFuGuyJeremy> \*hint\* \*hint\*) or posts on parenting, self-development, communication, motivation and more on <http://www.facebook.com/jeremyr.thekungfuguy>.

I trust that helps to give you some ideas on how to choose a good martial arts school in your area...

## Concluding thoughts...

And that's it... you now have a wealth of new information to make an informed decision about a professional martial arts program – regardless of the style or approach they use!

Simply print out the questionnaire to help you keep in mind all the new information and insider's secrets you have at your disposal, and rest assured that you'll find a great program, a great instructor, and a great experience for yourself, your child, and/or your family. Let me know how it goes – and I look forward to seeing you earn your first Black Belt or Black Sash!

As Grand Master Benny Meng, my Sifu and primary instructor in the martial arts – and founder of the Ving Tsun Museum – says, *“True warrior arts, as a way of life, promote peaceful communities through the cultivation of the personal power within each individual. Strength, resourcefulness, and responsibility replace fear, helplessness, and dependency as you meet challenges and find solutions for them. It is one thing to shrink back docilely in terror and a different thing to choose gentleness and harmony because, having attained the skills of devastation, you have removed the fear of angering or displeasing others. Only the truly powerful, or those who have nothing to lose, can be totally gentle with a free and unhindered heart, for they are invulnerable. You define the moment; don't let the moment define you.”*

I truly believe the world in which we live becomes a better place as each person wakes up the true capabilities contained within themselves. I know that studying the martial arts in a professional setting and earning a Black Belt, or Black Sash – at any age – increases the happiness, health, safety, wealth, and wisdom in the world, in the lives of my students, and now in your life too as you evaluate and join the right school for you, for your child, and for your desired outcomes.

I am humbled and honored to play a supporting role in your future success, and I look forward to the day we meet and shake hands in person. Until then, please allow me to conclude by saying, “Dojeh” – which is Cantonese (a Chinese dialect) for saying “Thank You for Giving Me a Gift” – the gift of your time and attention.

Make it an outstanding day, and I'll see you when I see you!

Sincerely,

Jeremy R

#1 Best Selling Author,

*The Kung Fu Kitties: The Adventure Begins*

*Your Best Child Ever: Is This Game Worth Winning?*

Transformational Expert and Coach for Families and Children (of all ages)

# Martial Arts Program Check List and Best Questions

## School Data (Date Visited: \_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone (\_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_  
 #: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Location: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Hours: \_\_\_\_\_ Website: \_\_\_\_\_

### I Facility (look around and note to yourself)

- 1 Does the facility look safe? Y N  
 2 Do you see any padding on the floor, mats, or safety equipment? Y N  
 3 Does the school look clean, smell clean, and is it well lit? Y N

### II Instructors

- 1 How many instructors do you have per class? # \_\_\_\_\_  
 2 What do you feel is an optimal student-to-instructor ratio? (~10:1 is optimal) \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_  
 3 What training or certification have your Instructors completed?  
 4 Is that training or certification within your school, or organization, only? Y N  
 5 How often do they do continuing education? (it should be on at least a monthly basis)  
 6 How long have your instructors been teaching or leading classes? # \_\_\_\_\_

### III Parents/Family

- 1 May I speak with some of the family of currently active student about your program? Y N  
 2 Comments from family (use back of this sheet, or additional pages, if necessary):  
 3 How much involvement do you prefer from Family? 

Lot	Little	None
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 4 I have a special concern for myself or my child, how will you do to address my concerns?

### IV Program

- 1 What is the primary purpose of martial arts?  
 2 Has the school received any awards or recognition from our community? Y N  
 3 How involved is your school in our community? 

Lot	Little	None
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 4 How many years have you been running this program? # years \_\_\_\_\_  
 5 How many Black Belts/Sashes have you produced? # \_\_\_\_\_  
 6 Do you track your children's report cards and/or student accomplishments  
 7 Do students spar? Y N  
 8 Do you use safety equipment? Y N  
 9 Why do students spar?  
 10 How do you assure quality in your students or instructors?  
 11 What forms of communication do you use with your students? (circle below)  
 Newsletter      Online Forum      Email List      Student Folder      Parent's Day      Other

### V Tuition (remember: Price vs Cost – invest now instead of paying later!)

- 1 What is the tuition for your program? < \$50    \$51-100    \$101-150    \$151-200    \$201-300    \$300+  
 2 How much for additional Family Members? # \_\_\_\_\_  
 3 How is tuition billed?      Weekly      Monthly      By Quarter      By Year  
 4 Is the tuition the same for higher level programs? (Black Belt, Leadership, Master Club, etc) Y N