

Finding a martial arts school is easy - finding a *good* school is difficult.

There are people who will actually write checks for \$2,000 up front, yet have not even looked at other schools.

Since most students do not know what to look for and are usually pressured into signing a contract, we have written this to help students find the right school without getting scammed by bad practices.

Stay away from "Belt Factories" (*Belt factory is a term used by martial artists to describe a school where image or profit is of a higher importance than standards; Please see the Belt Factory Quiz for more information*)! These types of schools are a waste of your time and money; any school that promises to make you a black belt or an expert in two years or less is a scam and you will be a fool for believing it! We are very concerned about what kids are being taught at these belt factories. Yes the student gains confidence, however, it will quickly be lost once they are confronted in the REAL world with an issue that will put that confidence in question. Often these students cannot deal with the slightest constructive criticism and their confidence is shot down for a long time. Imagine if they were put in a real self defense situation!

Most schools focus on one thing - sport, art, or self defense. What is your objective?

Don't be too concerned with the style (Taekwondo / Kung Fu / Aikido / Jujitsu / Hapkido) if the program meets your needs.

Keep in mind - a student who is good and has trained in SPORT styles, usually has no training in self defense.

ITEMS TO CONSIDER WHEN RESEARCHING MARTIAL ARTS SCHOOLS

- **Make sure ALL classes are taught by ADULT Black Belts! Color belts and high ranking students should lead the class in warm-up or stretching only! Some schools boast about "Grandmasters", "World Champions", and "Demonstration Team Members", yet you won't ever see them teaching the classes.**
- **If a school tells you they are "#1" or have the "best instructors", keep looking as this is a clear sign of huge egos. Those descriptions should be left for YOU to decide. *The amount of students enrolled is not an indication of their ability to train you.* While a school that has been established for several years and only has 25 students can be questionable, a school with 250 students can easily be unethical.**
- **If you see "black belts" under the age of 10 - leave immediately! Children cannot possibly understand the basics of martial arts, the philosophies of martial arts, teach adults or even defend themselves - *all basic requirements of the black belt*, regardless of how talented or bright that child may be! Simply ask one of these "black belts" what they would do in a given self defense situation - just listen to their explanation and wonder if they would really be able to do it.**
- **Steer clear of schools that use "Character Building", "Life Skills" and "Self Esteem Building" as their main criteria. *While that is a fine goal for many people, that should not be the central issue for martial arts training.* This is usually a mask for not requiring physical martial arts skills. Amazingly, we have students that transfer from these schools and have little martial arts skills or knowledge. The sad part is that if they ever need to use their martial arts and fail because they are overconfident, they will lose that confidence forever.**
- **Many schools combine kids and adults in the same class. This requires a slower pace of teaching since kids cannot learn at the same pace as adults. Our classes are separated between kids and adults. While we allow adults to take the kids class, kids are NOT allowed to take the adult classes.**
- **You may see an entire family at the same belt rank, or all students progressing at the same pace. This implies all students learn at the same pace. *EVERYONE learns differently!* The reason many schools do this is to keep the student (or their parents) "happy" and to keep them from quitting. The problem is that, in reality, the student learns little. We know this because, when we evaluate their techniques, we find that, in many cases, they need to retrain almost from the beginning. This practice has another negative effect: those students that practice on a regular basis and go to testing prepared tend to feel discouraged when they see everyone passed along regardless of their ability. The result is that they eventually quit or feel like they shouldn't bother to keep up with their training because, with less effort, they will be passed along with everyone else.**

- *There must be minimum time AND skill requirements from one belt rank to the next, and each student should be tested on requirements for their previous belts on every test!*
- **Politics have allowed some students to test for their next rank and bypass certain parts of their physical test. *EVERY student should physically test for ALL parts of the curriculum - NO EXCEPTIONS!* If there are physical impairments modifications can be made, however one cannot skip sparring for example just because they have "bad knees".**
- **If a school guarantees you will get a black belt, then it is EASY and the belt is WORTHLESS. This is like attending a college that will guarantee a diploma regardless of grades. Typical signs are schools that promote students automatically every 2-3 months regardless of their attendance or ability. A good martial arts school should never emphasize the belts or how quickly one will get to the next rank.**
- **Call the school and make sure their program will meet your goals. Then ask about tuition rates. If they want you to come in to discuss prices, it WILL be expensive. Some owners actually take seminars on how to answer the phone and get you to come in - expect the high pressure tactics and expect to be pressured into a 3 year commitment.**
- **Do NOT sign a contract for more than 1 year! Most contracts include an agreement that automatically deducts your monthly payment. Once you sign, you are totally committed whether you like the school or not. You will likely hear "*we will work something out if you do not like it here*". While you need to commit to your training for many years to be proficient, the school should not force you. We start all students on a trial month (with no further commitment). If you choose to continue your training with us we will then sign a contract. *Our school has 6 month, nine month (school-year) and 1 year agreements and you can pay by cash, check, or credit card.***
- **Does the school offer convenient class times? Are you limited to two days a week? If so, which two days? To become proficient you need to attend 3 classes per week. We offer classes Monday through Saturday and students can attend as often as they want.**
- **How do the students behave and act in AND out of the school? The foundation for martial arts training includes respect, discipline, character and mental skills. You will find an astonishing amount of students that behave badly and are disrespectful outside the school. In our school we believe that discipline and respect need to extend beyond the school doors. The back side of our testing form offers parents the opportunity to evaluate their child's performance at home (do they clean their room, do what they are told to do the first time they are asked to do it, help with household chores, maintain a good relationship with siblings, etc). This checklist is reviewed during testing and, if improvement is necessary, may keep the student from passing the test. Discipline and respect are a way of life, not an option.**

- If you are looking for a school for your child, will you be able to watch them take class? Some schools are so small or poorly designed, they don't even have an area which allows you to watch. The excuse you will likely hear is - "they need to concentrate and focus and we rather not have the interruption". In our view, that is also part of the training - to be able to focus with distractions. However, parents should never interrupt or assist during class times.
- Some schools depend on "After School Martial Arts" and "Summer Camps". Generally, there is nothing wrong with these programs, however those who depend on it usually have 30-50 kids in the program! If they have a day care license then you are leaving your child at a DAY CARE not a MARTIAL ARTS school! The reason they need a license is because they need to spend time with the kids on field trips, snack time and creative activities instead of martial arts. You will probably pay for day care at martial arts rates. Regardless of the number of "instructors" are with them, it is organized chaos at best. Without this program, the school cannot survive. *In fact, you will rarely even see adult students in these schools.*
- Make no mistake, schools need to make money to stay in business, but there is no reason for gouging. You will be very surprised at how your tuition may be the least of your expenses! Examples include: charging more than \$300 for sparring gear, more than \$60 for color belt tests and over \$500 for a first dan black belt. You may even be told that it comes from Korea, Japan, China or wherever - it rarely (if ever) does!
- Make sure you are ready to commit! Most people want to learn self defense, get into shape, etc., yet quit after 3-6 months. Martial arts is a way of life.
- Find out about the CHARACTER of the head instructor. This person is trying to teach you how to be a better person through the martial arts. There are many ways to check them out, but start by privately asking existing students and parents.