

THE
**COMPLETE
IDIOT'S**
GUIDE TO

"It's a great read with interesting and entertaining information for beginners and seasoned martial artists. You'll laugh and learn, and maybe even come out kicking and punching!"

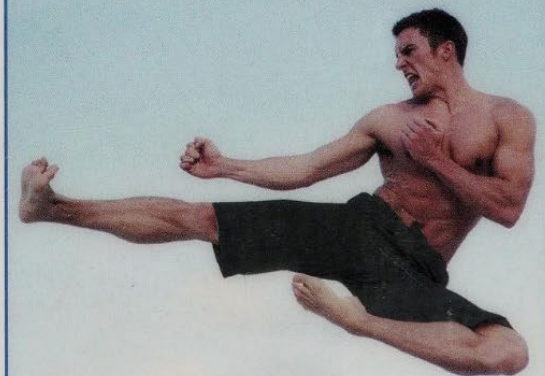
—Jean-Yves Theriault,
23-time World
Kickboxing Champion

Martial Arts

- ◆ **Quick and easy facts** about 13 martial arts disciplines
- ◆ **Valuable training tips** and suggestions for selecting the right martial art
- ◆ **Down-to-earth advice** about the physical and mental benefits of martial arts for children, teens, and adults

**Cezar Borkowski
and Marion Manzo**

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With love and appreciation to our mothers, Alicja and Eileen, and to our "extended family"—the more than 2000 teachers, staff, and students of Northern Karate Schools.

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The Joy of Reaching Your Personal Goals

In This Chapter

- How a martial arts goal plan can help you get on track
- Tactics for staying motivated
- Measuring your progress from White Belt to Black Belt and beyond
- Understanding the rank system for color and black belts
- Discovering your ultimate aim as a martial artist

Ancient warriors generally had one primary goal: to be alive at the end of the day. Modern “warriors” usually have a more complicated agenda revolving around their physical, mental and spiritual needs and desires.

In this chapter, you’ll discover the important role a goal plan can play in helping you achieve your martial arts objectives. You’ll learn how to craft and follow that plan, determine what your objectives are, assign timelines to each one and monitor your progress as you move up the rank ladder.

More importantly, this chapter will help you understand what your *supreme* goal should be as a martial artist.

Constructing Your Martial Arts Goal Plan

Before you can develop your personal goal plan for your martial arts education, you'd be well advised to make a personal inventory. You might want to begin by answering the following questions:

- Do I have a history of starting, then quitting, things?
- Am I frequently late or do I miss appointments?
- Do I often misplace or lose things, or forget what task I am trying to complete?
- Do I neglect my physical, mental and spiritual health?
- As I reflect upon my life, are there few, if any, accomplishments I can celebrate?

No scientific scoring system is necessary to understand that too many "yes" answers mean you might not be the perfect candidate for a martial arts program. But the flip side to this revelation is that if you have a history of starting and quitting things, tardiness, an inability to focus on the task at hand and neglect of your physical, mental and spiritual health, and few moments of achievement come readily to mind, you probably *need* martial arts training! Perhaps that's why you bought this book in the first place. If so, this simple act of deciding whether a martial arts self-improvement program can help you get and stay on track is cause for celebration.

When you begin your martial arts education, you'll be amazed at how organized your life will become, with set class times and target dates for examinations.

Every month or thereabouts, you'll be expected to learn a list of techniques (assuming your school follows an established curriculum, which has been explained to you or detailed in a student handbook). In schools that follow the standard ranking system, if you practice consistently, every few months you'll probably test for a new color belt.



Warrior Words

Whether you call it a *routine*, *habit* or *pattern*, cultivating a learning method that is reinforced through positive repetition is one way of improving your chances of achieving your goals.

If you miss a week or two of classes, a staff member of your martial arts school will likely call you and may even schedule a refresher class to ensure you're able to adhere to your goal plan. He or she may also contact you to remind you about upcoming tests, seminars or other extracurricular activities. All this will help you stay motivated.

The staff at your school will track your improvements and carefully monitor your developmental areas, noting them in your file or on your student membership or report card.

And all you have to do is show up, train and practice at home if necessary. Sounds like a good deal, no? If only your entire life were this well planned!

This Could Be the Start of Something Big

From your very first day as a martial arts student, you'll be encouraged to set and achieve a goal, and then to establish new goals.

When you arrive to take your first class, you'll be asked to complete an application form. Generally speaking, this will include questions about your goals, which may include self-defense, weight loss, toning, fun, fitness, discipline, competition...well, you get the idea. Your martial arts teacher or a program director will review this and other information with you.

This document and subsequent assessments will help you plot your martial arts future.

All in Good Time

Now that you and your martial arts teacher have ascertained your primary goals, you're undoubtedly wondering how much time it will take to achieve them.

That depends on a variety of factors. These include how committed you are to attending classes regularly, how often you'll supplement classroom training with practice at home (or in a gym if necessary) and how well you'll take care of your body, mind and spirit.

Therefore, it is difficult to assign precise timelines to your goals. However, here are a few guidelines to follow for specific objectives:

- self-defense – As noted in other chapters in this book, depending upon your chosen martial discipline, it could take you anywhere from a few months to a year to learn basic self-defense techniques.
- weight loss, toning, fitness – Again, there are many factors, such as genetics, diet and other physical activity you participate in, that will come into play if these are your primary goals. But, generally, you can expect to look and feel better within a matter of a few weeks or months.
- discipline, confidence – As noted, you'll be expected to set goals and begin practicing required techniques from your first day as a martial arts student. Making progress in this area can help you become more disciplined and confident in other aspects of your life. The time it takes before you see a marked change depends largely on your work habits and commitment to improving yourself.
- competition – Some schools encourage students to begin participating in tournaments at the novice or beginner level (within 3 to 6 months of starting). Some prefer that you wait until you have more experience (one or more years), while others discourage students from engaging in this kind of activity altogether.
- fun – You'll learn interesting skills and make new friends from your very first day

as a martial arts student. This experience can bring about a sense of achievement and be extremely enjoyable. Additionally, in a good school, the enthusiasm an instructor feels for his or her martial arts training should be infectious. That is, you should sense his or her passion for training and each class should be informative, challenging and fun.

The Importance of Being Regular

Now that you've determined what you want to accomplish and you've assigned general timelines to each goal, it's time to put your plan into action by developing a regular training schedule. This is easier to do if your school offers classes in the morning, at noon, in the evening and on the weekend, seven days a week. Once you've committed to a weekly schedule, view your classes as appointments with yourself or, more precisely, with the person you're striving to become.

Despite the best-laid plans, unexpected meetings or family commitments will sometimes take precedence over your martial arts schedule. When this happens, get back on track as soon as possible by resuming your training schedule quickly and scheduling refresher classes if needed. If you require makeup classes, be advised that most schools offer a reasonable number of these free of charge, while others require a small fee.

Putting Yourself to the Test

You've determined your goals and figured out how long it may take to achieve each one. You've planned your weekly training schedule to ensure you stay focused and accomplish your objectives. So, what's next? Determining your testing schedule.

Some schools conduct monthly "stripe," or interim, examinations. These are an excellent way of gauging your progress in the short term. Generally, you can expect to receive a stripe or equivalent rank advancement every 8 to 12 classes.



Martial Smarts

Many are stubborn in pursuit of the path they have chosen, few in the pursuit of the goal.

—Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche

Other martial arts institutions use only periodic color belt evaluations, with students participating every 3 to 6 months on average.

Whatever the case, you should be familiar with the requirements for each rank and know how often you can expect to be evaluated.

Charting Your Progress

We've designed a simple chart to assist you in monitoring your progress in the area of martial arts rank.

Rank Advancement

Belt or Rank	Target Date	Date Received
White Belt or Beginner	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
Black Belt or Equivalent Rank	_____	_____

This is a general list based on a 10-step rank system that is appropriate for most martial arts disciplines. Consult your instructor in preparing your customized rank advancement chart. Later in this chapter, you'll read more about belts and ranking systems and how they vary from style to style and school to school.

A final word about testing. Like any other activity that requires you to demonstrate your best efforts, martial arts examinations can be a source of anxiety, excitement and, yes, even enjoyment. Learning to master these kinds of physical, mental and spiritual challenges can help you better manage other stressful situations that are part of daily life. Expect to be nervous. Expect to sweat. You'll need the adrenaline boost you're feeling to help you get over the "humps" that occur during tests and to give you a winning edge. And remember this: you've trained for this moment, so rely on what you know. Every teacher, fellow student and spectator in the room has one thing in common with you—they all want you to succeed.



Martial Smarts

Sixty years ago I knew everything. Now, I know nothing. Education is the progressive discovery of our own ignorance.

—Will Durant

Getting Practical

In addition to charting rank advancement, you should also develop a simple method of assessing your progress in other martial arts and related areas.

Practical Skills Progress

(1 = needs improvement, 2 = satisfactory, 3 = good, 4 = very good, 5 = excellent)

Area	Rating				
Aerobic Fitness	1	2	3	4	5
Strength	1	2	3	4	5
Endurance	1	2	3	4	5
Flexibility	1	2	3	4	5
Striking Skills	1	2	3	4	5
Kicking Skills	1	2	3	4	5
Breakfalls	1	2	3	4	5
Grappling Skills	1	2	3	4	5
Throws and Takedowns	1	2	3	4	5
Weapons Skills	1	2	3	4	5
Forms or Routines	1	2	3	4	5
Sparring	1	2	3	4	5
Self-Defense	1	2	3	4	5
Terminology	1	2	3	4	5
History, Culture and Philosophy	1	2	3	4	5

This progress chart should be periodically reassessed and revised as needed.

This general checklist will be applicable for most, but not all, martial arts. Consult your instructor in preparing a customized practical skills progress chart.

Rainbow of Belts

The ranking system is one tangible way of measuring your martial arts progress.

If you practice an Okinawan, Japanese or Korean system, you will likely wear a white belt as a beginner and progress through a kaleidoscope of color belts until you reach



Risky Moves

Warning: one way to *decrease* your chances of achieving your martial arts goals is to avoid writing them down. Recording your objectives on paper makes them real, and reading them daily makes it more likely that you'll stick to your plan.

Black Belt. Historically speaking, there were no "color" belts. No one wore orange or purple belts. Practitioners were simply given a white belt whose color darkened with years of wear and tear. But when Kano Jigoro, the founder of Judo, developed a multi-tiered rank system, a spectrum of color belts was introduced. This rank system is still used in the majority of martial arts schools around the world.

The following are the colors of belts in the Okinawan and Japanese system.

1. white
2. yellow
3. orange
4. green
5. blue
6. purple
7. brown
8. black

Some schools include half-steps, for example, a brown belt with a black stripe.

Here are the colors in the Korean belt system.

1. white
2. yellow or gold
3. green
4. blue
5. red
6. black

Some schools add striped belts, such as a yellow belt with a green stripe, or a green belt with a blue stripe.



Master Speaks

If you wear a color or Black Belt and you transfer to another school, even one that teaches the style you've been practicing, you may be required to wear a White Belt. Don't fret. Given your previous martial arts experience, you're likely to progress more quickly than the average student.

While the color belts are generally accepted as the classical belt ranking system, the imagination of North American practitioners is boundless. For example, you might also see camouflage-printed belts that would make even Rambo proud.

As tenure and technical requirements vary from institution to institution, you should be aware that your belts might be recognized only in your school. If, for example, you transfer to another institution, some instructors may permit you to retain your rank and belt, while others may require you to start all over again, as a White Belt or beginner.

Time Travel

You probably know the expression "Good things come to those who wait." In martial arts training, this may or may not be true. Perhaps, good things come to those who work hard, hustle (not the disco dance) and are persistent. If you are patient and you work diligently to achieve your goals, what can you expect as a beginner, novice and intermediate student and how long might you stay at these levels? Read on.

Beginner

It's great to be a beginner. No matter what you do, everyone praises you and you have nowhere to go but up. Enjoy this period of your martial arts education. Think of your training as a long leisurely train ride, rather than a high-speed Concorde flight. Relish (not the condiment!) the journey at least as much as the destination. Build a solid foundation for advancement. Practice proper etiquette, such as bowing. Study how to wear your uniform and tie your belt correctly. Determine the appropriate manner of addressing senior students and instructors. And, of course, learn how to perform basic techniques—safely.



Martial Smarts

Do not despise the bottom rungs in the ascent to greatness.

—Publilius Syrus

Novice

The novice level is usually regarded as Green Belt or an equivalent rank, which can take you approximately one year to attain. At this stage, you'll probably possess some good fundamental skills. Perhaps, you're becoming more physically fit and can pump out push-ups with the best of them. You can probably perform most basic techniques with proper form, speed and power. Additionally, at

this point in your training, you might be developing areas of preference. Some novice students enjoy practicing forms, whereas others prefer sparring. Some focus on practical self-defense and others enjoy training with heavy bags and pads—usually followed by cleaning up their sweat puddles off the classroom floor.

Intermediate

It could take you 2 to 3 years to reach the Brown Belt or equivalent level. As an intermediate level student, you are skilled at most basic techniques and may even be called upon to demonstrate in front of the class. But don't let your elevated status go to your head. You're being groomed for your Black Belt. As such, you're now a role model and will be held to a higher standard than beginner or novice students. As you climb higher, you'll be expected to demonstrate near-perfect form, coupled with an attitude worthy of a Black Belt.



Risky Moves

Don't be in a hurry to reach your Black Belt or equivalent rank. With advancement comes responsibility or, in the words of Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, "Life always gets harder towards the summit."

Black Belt and Beyond

You've sweated and toiled for 3 to 5 years and now your instructor proudly ties a Black Belt around your waist. This is a momentous occasion. Dust off that vintage bottle of champagne and pause to celebrate everything that went into this achievement, just as you would if you'd earned a university degree, received a promotion at work, purchased your first home or said "I do" (for the first, second or even third time!).

What this moment *doesn't* symbolize is the end of your training. Receiving your Black Belt shouldn't cause you to take a leave of absence (or, for that matter, a leave of your senses). It shouldn't prompt you to slow down your martial arts education.

Staying the Course

At this juncture, you should be less preoccupied with the mere aesthetics of what you're performing. You should also begin researching the deeper meaning and what is often referred to as "the hidden techniques" of the discipline you're practicing. This research may require you to spend less time on individual training and rely on practicing with a variety of partners, assessing how each technique must be adjusted if it is to remain effective against different-sized opponents.

As your study takes on new depth and new meaning, you may become more frustrated than you were as a White Belt just getting the hang of performing the simplest



Master Speaks

When you receive a shiny new Black Belt, the first thing you'll probably want to do is wear it out! A threadbare Black Belt is an emblem of a skilled practitioner. As the fabric becomes worn and loses its color, the belt's white inner core is revealed. This process also symbolizes the cycle of martial arts training: the more you learn, the more you realize how little you know.

techniques. An experienced instructor should work with you to anticipate, understand and surmount these plateaus in your martial arts education.

But how will you continue to stay motivated and feel the excitement of your first day in a martial arts class and the joy of receiving your first stripe, belt or certificate of rank advancement? You'll have to establish new goals and renew your commitment to your martial arts study. An experienced instructor will continue to introduce you to fresh, more complex material with a view to ensuring you evade the perilous pitfall of stagnation and avoid getting side-tracked.

Ten Degrees of Separation

Generally speaking, there are 10 degrees, or levels, of Black Belt. Just as color belts serve as benchmarks of progress for novice and intermediate students, so

too do these advanced levels aid students in staying focused on polishing techniques and acquiring more highly evolved martial knowledge.

Typically, the time it will take you to move from level to level (or in some systems, *dan* to *dan*) will correspond to the rank in question. For example, if you're a First Degree Black Belt testing for your Second Degree, you might be expected to train for a minimum of 2 years. Or if you're progressing from Second to Third Degree, it might be 3 years. Moving from Third to Fourth Degree could require a minimum training period of 4 years. Pretty simple?

Yes and no. As you progress even higher, tenure is just one criterion for advancement. Up to the rank of Sixth Degree Black Belt, you'll probably be required to participate in a physical exam. How demanding this test is depends on the discipline or style of martial art you're studying, your school's association with an international organization, and, often, your age and fitness level.

If you're a candidate for Seventh Degree Black Belt and above, it would be unusual for you to engage in a physical examination. Other factors, like contributions you've made to the propagation of martial arts, would be considered before you were approved for advancement. At this level, you'd be expected to encourage the spread of martial arts by teaching, writing books, publishing papers or conducting seminars. You'd likely be queried on how many Black Belt students you've produced and which martial arts you've researched and practiced. Additionally, the length of time you've trained and your age are important criteria. For example, if you were a candidate for the rank of *Hanshi*, or Grand Master level, you would have to have trained for 40 or more years and be a minimum of 65 years of age. It's interesting to note that this is the same age at which North Americans generally retire!



Risky Moves

In your search for a martial arts school, be forewarned. You may encounter numerous Black Belts, some of whom are still in their 20s and who claim to hold the rank of Sixth, Seventh, Eighth, Ninth or even Tenth Degree! While these individuals may have been child prodigies and might possess superlative skills, it's unlikely they've trained for a sufficient period of time to meet minimum tenure requirements for these advanced level grades.

The Ultimate Goal of a Martial Artist

We began this chapter by encouraging you to construct a martial arts goal plan. You've achieved your objectives; getting stronger, fitter and more knowledgeable belt by belt. So far, so good.

What comes next? We assume that at this stage of your study, you understand that martial arts can make you a better person and, in turn, you as a martial artist can make the world a better place. At this advanced level of training, you probably feel more confident, patient and tolerant than ever before. With these powerful skills, you may come to know a state of *wa* (Japanese) or *wu* (Chinese), meaning "harmony" or "peace." Not the 1960s carry-a-placard version, but rather a serenity that quiets your heart and mind and the collective heart and mind of those who share the martial arts approach to personal discovery. This harmonious feeling can be highly infectious and should be shared with the world around you.

So at the most advanced level of training, what should be your ultimate goal? To focus less on your own personal gains and instead make a positive contribution to the lives of others. While you may pick up some self-defense techniques, or become more physically fit in a matter of months and receive your Black Belt in just a few years, this final objective may take decades or even a lifetime of martial arts study.



Martial Smarts

The angry [people] will defeat [themselves] in battle as well as in life.

—samurai maxim

The Least You Need to Know

- A martial arts goal plan begins with a personality inventory and should include your physical, mental and spiritual objectives.

- Assigning timelines, adhering to a training schedule, preparing yourself to test regularly and charting your progress will help you get and stay motivated.
- Pre-Black Belt training stages can be summarized as beginner, novice and intermediate.
- Generally, there are 10 steps from beginner to Black Belt (or equivalent rank), followed by 10 advanced levels, sometimes called *dan* by Japanese, Okinawan and Korean martial artists.
- Most practitioners understand that reaching the Black Belt level marks a new beginning in, rather than an end to, their martial arts training.
- The ultimate goal of martial arts practitioners should be to progress from enjoying the positive effects their training has on their own lives, to recognizing the positive influence they can have on the lives of others.

Palestra The ancient Greek name for a gymnasium with a soft clay floor where students practiced wrestling.

Pankration Means “complete strength” and is the name of an ancient Grecian martial art that combined boxing and wrestling techniques.

Pedang A machete used by Silat practitioners.

Pneuma The Greek word used to describe your life force (*ki* in Japanese, *chi* in Chinese).

Pranavayu The Indian word used to describe your life force.

Pushing hands Refers to a partner exercise performed by Tai Chi practitioners. Its purpose is to develop defensive and offensive skills and improve a student's coordination.

Randori The Judo term for free sparring.

Rank (or Ranking System) A system of assessing a martial arts student's level of ability or expertise.

Rei A Japanese term meaning “respect,” “courtesy” or “veneration.” This word also describes the bow performed by students of Japanese martial arts.

Religio-philosophical schools Systems of thought that had a profound influence on the evolution of martial arts. These schools include Taoism (Daoism), Confucianism, Buddhism, Shintoism, Hinduism, Islam, Catholicism and Tagalog.

Restraints Controlling techniques wherein you restrict your opponent by means of joint-locking or applying pressure to a vital point, using arm bars or wrist and ankle locks.

Ryu (or *Ryuha*) Means a “style,” “branch” or “school” of a particular martial art.

Ryukyu The ancient name for Okinawa, also called “Loo Chew” in Chinese.

Sabom A Korean word for “teacher.”

Safety gear Protective equipment worn by practitioners of many martial arts. One of the chief developers of modern, foam-dipped sparring gear was Tae Kwon Do legend Jhoon Rhee.

Sambo A Russian martial art based on Mongolian wrestling.

Samurai Means “one who serves” and is the name of feudal Japanese warriors who were employed by chieftain rulers.

Sanchin Means “three struggles” and refers to the use of martial arts practice to strengthen your body, mind and spirit. *Sanchin* is also the name of a popular Okinawan Karate *kata*.