

Your free eBook!

How to Find the Right Martial Arts School for You!



Kevin Brett

The Author of:

The Way of the Martial Artist

Achieving Success in Martial Arts and in Life!

<http://www.KevinBrettStudios.com>



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Warning & Disclaimer

Marital arts can be lethal and the practice of martial arts or application of various martial arts techniques, training drills and exercises can cause serious injury or death. This book is intended for informational and entertainment purposes. It is not intended as a substitute for a specific martial arts training program by a qualified martial arts school or instructor. You should consult a qualified physician before engaging in any exercise program or physical activities to ascertain whether you or the other participants are mentally and physically healthy enough to engage in such activities.

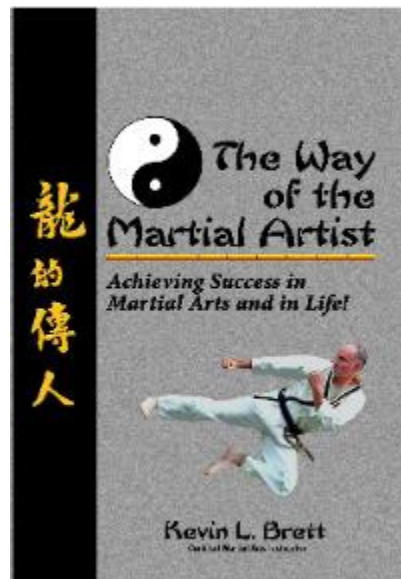
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Press Release:

New Book Asks: Do You Have Everything You Need in Your Black Belt Toolkit?

Stafford, Virginia January 27, 2009: Kevin Brett Studios, Incorporated releases ***The Way of the Martial Artist: Achieving Success in Martial Arts and in Life!*** (240 pp., \$16.00, ISBN-13: 978-0981935003), a new book available from Amazon subsidiary CreateSpace.com at the author's web site www.KevinBrettStudios.com. This book helps readers understand if their martial arts training will actually work in a self-defense situation and what is likely lacking in their training. Certified Martial Arts Instructor Kevin Brett answers this question and many more in his new book.



Martial arts are about survival and this book teaches readers how to develop the skill, strategy and character of a true martial artist to supplement their dojo training. It also provides in-depth insight into just what students and parents want from martial arts: discipline, commitment, honor, respect, perseverance and ultimately – success in any life-undertaking. Kevin Brett provides answers and insights to questions that all martial artists ask during their quest for excellence, purpose and enlightenment.

The Way of the Martial Artist: Achieving Success in Martial Arts and in Life! uses the principles of martial arts to show readers how any worthwhile goal or life challenge can be approached and achieved with black belt determination. The servant-warrior is an ancient concept that the author re-introduces to help modern readers understand how any success should be a service or benefit to others.

Shawn Kovacich, author of the highly acclaimed book series *Achieving Kicking Excellence* and high-ranking martial artist, calls ***The Way of the Martial Artist***, "A comprehensive framework of the numerous principles and concepts you will need to become the best martial artist that you can be." Black belt **Richard Hefner** says, "*The Way of the Martial Artist is part success manual, part martial arts guide and part survival guide, and all essential!*"

Lawrence Kane, author of *Surviving Armed Assaults and Martial Arts Instruction*; co-author of *The Way of Kata*, *The Way to Black Belt*, and *The Little Black Book of Violence* says, "*Kevin Brett has written an informative, interesting and useful book that I wholeheartedly recommend.*"

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How to Find the Right Martial Arts School for You!



Entertainment | Education | Family

Introduction

Hello, my name is Kevin Brett. I am a certified Martial Arts Instructor with more than twenty years of training and teaching experience in the martial arts. I am the author of ***The Way of the Martial Artist: Achieving Success in Martial Arts and in Life!*** available from Amazon subsidiary CreateSpace.com through my website at: www.KevinBrettStudios.com



I have developed this free eBook ***How to Find the Right Martial Arts School for You!*** to help anyone who is looking to find a martial arts school for themselves or their children become a better educated consumer as you begin your quest to find a suitable martial arts school that will meet your needs and expectations. There are many benefits to be gained from martial arts study for both children and adults. There are many styles of martial arts; many masters and many schools to choose from. There are many different types of martial arts programs and memberships and

payment plans. A little education in the whole matter will go a long way to helping you feel more confident in whatever decision you make.

The difficulty with shopping for a martial arts school is that you are not qualified to evaluate the quality of the instruction. What many potential students of martial arts focus on first is location, price and amenities. Yes, you want a school that is reasonably close to work or home and certainly you do not want to have to break the bank to afford it, but these are not the most important features. The quality of the instruction is paramount. You will be spending three or four days per week there if you are serious about improving and gaining what there is to gain so ask a lot of questions; visit a lot of schools many times before making a choice. Read about various styles of martial arts on the internet or in books to gain a better understanding of the differences between them.

Why are you interested in Martial Arts?

So you're looking for a martial arts school or maybe you're looking for a school for your children. Either way there is a reason or motivation behind your desire to find a school. Understanding what you are looking for will make it easier to know when you have found what you are looking for.



Black belts come in all sizes and ages!

Shopping for a martial arts school can be confusing and a bit disconcerting. There are literally hundreds of martial arts styles from many countries. Pick up any copy of the Yellow Pages in any medium to large metropolitan area and you will likely see dozens of advertisements for a plethora of martial arts schools. There are masters, grand masters, champions, world champions, senseis and sifus. There is Kung Fu, T'ai Chi, Judo, Tae Kwon Do, Shotokan, Aikido, Brazilian Jiu Jitsu, Karate Do, Kendo, Hapkido and many other "Do's" How can one sort them all out and begin to understand how to proceed?

Let's begin with understanding why you are looking for a martial arts school. What got you interested? What do you expect to get out of martial arts? There a number of reasons that people typically

seek martial arts training for themselves or their children. Here are a few of the common reasons:

Reasons Adults Study Martial Arts

- I want to learn to defend myself.**
- I want a different kind of workout than the local gym or health club.**
- I want a total body workout that includes cardio kickboxing.**
- I want to develop self-confidence, self-esteem, self-discipline.**
- I want to study martial arts traditions and styles as an art form.**
- I want to compete in martial arts tournaments.**
- I want to lose weight and get in shape.**
- I want to learn to become more focused (hey even adults need focus and structure!)**
- I want to become better at setting goals and achieving them.**
- I want to learn more about traditional martial arts values and ethics: humility, respect, honor, determination, perseverance, etc.**



Respect and confidence are key qualities

For our children, the common reasons are similar:

Reasons Children Study Martial Arts

- I want my child to learn to defend himself/herself.
- I want my child to become involved in a vigorous physical activity.
- I want my child to develop self-confidence, self-esteem, self-discipline, respect.
- I want my child to learn more about goal setting and personal achievement.
- I want my child to learn traditional martial arts values and ethics: humility, respect, honor, determination, perseverance, etc.
- I want my child to learn to become better focused to help him or her out in school and in life.

These two lists are pretty much carbon copies of virtually every advertisement you will ever see for any martial arts school. Somewhere in the promotional materials for any self-respecting school will be these key values, benefits and selling points. You the shopper must beware because while almost every school will claim to meet these needs, not all will really deliver the goods. This eBook will help you better understand what you should look for and ultimately what your study of the martial arts should include. If you study martial arts as they have been studied for centuries and learn the many qualities and skills that a true martial artist seeks to develop, you will achieve all of the objectives identified in the previous lists.

Martial Arts Are About Survival

Here's a shocker for you ... martial arts are about survival. Yep, that's right. The purpose of martial arts is to have the skill and knowledge to be able to do in the bad guy and still make it home in time to walk the dog. Martial arts are not some trendy type of workout designed to impress the ladies as you tell them about the tournaments or trophies you've won. While it certainly is an awesome total-body workout and a great way to get in shape many students really give little thought to its ultimate purpose; survival.

Let's talk self-defense. I was one of the co-founders of the United Karate Institute of Self-Defense, Inc. in Alexandria, Virginia. Three other instructors, my wife (also a black belt) and I decided that we had met way too many highly ranked black belts who had earned numerous trophies in sport karate competition. They were

champions and winners and knew all the tricks in the ring to be able to score points and come home with the large gleaming plastic and marble trophies. Sounds great doesn't it. Except for one small problem, many of these black belt "champions" did not possess even the most basic skills or knowledge of how to defend themselves against even a single assailant, much less multiple assailants. What's up with that?



If you can't defend yourself ... nothing else matters!

They're black belts. They should be able to leap over tall buildings, outrun bullets, stop a speeding train and run between the raindrops! Right? No, but it certainly seems to the average person that a black

belt must be nearly indestructible and probably possesses some almost mystical power and knowledge. Wrong again. If you are not trained properly with a real emphasis on self-defense and street application of martial arts techniques then you are merely mimicking movements from your instructor.

If you're a black belt and you can't even defend yourself on the street then what have you spent all of those years doing? Let me say it again, martial arts are about survival. It's not about phony point-sparring competition where the only techniques you can use in the ring are things you would never dream of using on the street and where the most effective techniques from the street are not allowed in the ring.

When you study martial arts it's not all just punching and kicking, you must learn about many qualities of humanity, both positive and negative because your brain is your ultimate survival tool. Ultimately, at its core, is the need to survive; be it on the streets of New York City, the jungles of Asia, the deserts of the Middle East or even a hostile business climate. To survive combat and harsh environments, you the martial artist must have many skills and have developed many physical and character qualities. In order to survive, you must improve yourself beyond your current abilities. However, remember the best warrior is not warlike, but is able to summon the warrior spirit within when it is required.

Martial Arts Benefits

In this section we'll discuss benefits of martial arts study. We've already itemized many of the common benefits our outcomes that many people hope to gain from martial arts for themselves or their children. When you begin calling around or visiting martial arts schools I strongly recommend you make a list of your specific reasons based on the two lists in the previous section. Whether you are shopping for yourself or your children, first make certain you know just what you are looking for. Review the list in the table below and add any other reasons, benefits or desired outcomes you hope to gain from your adventure into the martial arts.



Meditation helps calm the soul and sharpen your focus for learning

Benefits of Martial Arts

- Self-Confidence**
- Self-Defense**
- Self-Discipline**
- Physical Fitness**
- Goal setting**
- Improved focus and concentration**
- Respect for authority and others**
- Self-Respect**

Now that you have given it some thought and hopefully gotten a better idea of what you are searching for let me assure you that once you find a suitable school, regardless of what reasons you are interested in entering the study of martial arts I am certain you will find it invigorating and rewarding on many levels and you may even realize some benefits that you had never anticipated.

One side benefit of my study of martial arts is that when I first enrolled and earned my white belt, there was a very attractive blond in my white belt class who had signed up at the same time. She apparently had her eye on me while I was only focused on martial arts and developing the strength and stamina to continue on through the ranks. Four years later we were married and four years after that we opened the United Karate Institute of Self Defense, Inc. in Alexandria, Virginia with three other instructors - not a bad side benefit. Certainly, I had not ever expected that signing up for martial arts would lead me to owning and managing a school and meeting my future wife!

At this point you have a list of reasons why you are interested in martial arts and what you hope to get out of it. Something to keep in mind however, is that martial arts and martial arts schools are not silver bullets. By that I mean that the instructors and curriculum and are not miracle cures for all that ails you or all that you hope to achieve. They can provide encouragement, structure and educate you to varying degrees on the basic values and qualities that will help you satisfy your needs. You will need to do much work to develop any skill, level or knowledge or personal qualities to reach the goals you have set for yourself or your child. Do not put all the burden or responsibility on the shoulders of your martial arts instructor.

Before you start looking for a martial arts school there are a few more things you will need to consider.

Martial Arts Instructors

As with school teachers, doctors, pilots, and any other profession, all martial arts instructors are not created equal. First of all, you have to remember martial arts are just that – an art form. Martial arts schools are not federally or state controlled. There is no consumer watchdog agency to ensure the quality or legitimacy of martial arts instruction. There are no national standards, criteria or requirements for martial arts. This is both a blessing and a curse. Essentially anyone can open a martial arts school after obtaining a business license. Decent schools have instructors with a reasonable idea about what they are doing with their art and their teaching ability and at the same time also understand how to run

the school as a business so they can pay the rent and keep the lights on. That being said, what does that tell you about their martial art, their ability to teach what you are looking for and the actual benefits that you will receive from studying with them. Nothing much.

In the previous section there were a number of questions that I asked you answer about yourself and your reasons for wanting to study martial arts. In this section we'll address some of the questions. you need to pose to the martial arts school instructors and owners



Mini-warriors learn control and self-discipline under pressure

First a few rules of thumb to consider: You will encounter many Masters and Grandmasters. Schools and their advertisements will tout their owner's amazing achievements in martial arts competition or in rank achievement. Many school owners will be high-ranking black belts such as 5th degree black belt up through 10th degree

black belt. Every martial arts style has a slightly different scale of belts or sashes and ranks. Don't let this confuse, impress or intimidate you. Think of it as nothing more than some one who has gone through elementary school, then on to middle school, high school, college and possibly graduate school. Rank means nothing if the knowledge of the "Masters" cannot help you achieve your goals.

All schools will claim to teach the standard fare: discipline, self-confidence, respect, etc. All schools will try to impress you with the qualifications and accomplishments of the owner or master, however, you will almost never be taught by that person, but by his or her junior instructors – often times you may be taught by an 18 year old who is a 1st degree black belt or sometimes even a brown belt. There is nothing inherently wrong with this as long as you do receive some instruction from higher ranking black belts as you increase in rank over time.

Some schools will tout the fact that they belong to some national or international association or federation related to their martial arts style. This is not a bad thing, but it is not a guarantee that you will receive quality instruction or that there will be good focus on self-defense or other key studies I discuss this in detail in my book, ***The Way of the Martial Artist: Achieving Success in Martial Arts and in Life!***

Most schools will try to fit you into what programs they have to offer. You want to try to pry more info out of them on how they will fit your needs and specifically how they will meet the claims that they make.

Finally keep in mind that martial arts schools are not miracle factories. You will have to work and put a lot into it in order to get a lot out of it.

As we go through each of the sections of this book there will be lists of questions for you.

Instructor Questions for a Martial Arts School

- How many instructors are on your staff?**
- What are their ages and qualifications or ranks?**
- How long have they been with you? (good schools will be good at retaining qualified and motivated instructor staff)**
- Are there any non-black belt level instructors teaching such as brown belts or red-belts? In other words, how much black belt instruction will I actually receive?**
- How do you train or qualify instructors? Are instructors simply those who have earned black belts or have they been through any type of instructor certification or training program?**



Keep in mind that many schools may be staffed by one or two full-time instructors or school managers while the rest of the teaching staff is composed of part-time black belts who may not have been through any type of comprehensive instructor training or certification. This is where my comment earlier about all instructors not being created equal comes in. You must keep in mind that even if an instructor is certified by some means under someone that simply means they have had some type of training program that they have passed or through which they have earned some type of certificate. It does not mean they are skilled at teaching, gifted, motivated or even very competent. I must stress the importance here of visiting schools and watching several classes

and how the different instructors interact with students at various belt ranks and skill levels. If a school will not allow you to observe their classes or answer questions about their instructors you probably want to pass on that organization.

Any martial arts instruction should emphasize discipline and respect toward instructors and toward students as well as self-discipline. Instructors should be like an encouraging coach. There are times to be tough and times to be inspiring and motivating. Watch for this. It is important to discuss with the instructors how they handle discipline. What methods do they use? Do they consider or handle input from parents, school teachers or other concerned parties. Discipline is important to reinforce respect and to provide boundaries for what is acceptable behavior, but it should not become an open door for verbal abuse or demeaning students. Discipline should be a learning experience and have a positive outcome that helps the student grow from the experience.

While experience is important it is not the only thing that makes a good instructor. At United Karate we had one junior instructor who was eighteen and a first degree black belt. He was gifted with motivating children and keeping them under control, engaged and focused. Adults were also inspired by this young man.

Here is a list of some desirable traits you would hope to find in instructors:

Instructor Qualities

- Focused – doesn't get sidetracked from the lesson plan or the point that he or she is making.**
- Motivational – encourages everyone to dig deep and to want to work hard to improve.**
- Technically competent – must know the curriculum and be able to explain and break down techniques, kata/forms and all important strategies and concepts.**
- Knowledgeable – should have a reasonable grasp of the differences between major martial arts styles such as Chinese styles (Kung Fu, T'ai Chi), Korean Styles (Tae Kwon Do, Hapkido, Tang Soo Do, Mu Duk Kwon) Japanese Styles (Karate Do, Aiki Do, Kendo, Jiu Jitsu) Brazilian, Pilipino and so forth.**
- Disciplinary – able to maintain order, keep attention of the students, commands respect.**
- Technically skilled – able to demonstrate any and all techniques and concepts the way they should be performed.**
- Detail oriented – able to focus on small details of technique and performance.**
- Traditional – able to draw upon martial arts history, traditions and values and teach respect, humility, perseverance and many others essential qualities that all martial artists must develop.**
- Instructors may or may not be in excellent physical shape, but they should be able to teach students how to properly execute techniques. Although it is generally a good sign when an instructor leads by example and is able to do exercises with the class at times. At other times it is**

important that the instructor is walking around observing as the class performs the exercises so that he or she can watch for proper technique and motivate students.

- Some instructors will expect students to condition themselves outside of class so that class time can be used to teach techniques while other instructors will use class time explicitly to help students physically train and condition. Both approaches have their pros and cons.**
- Good instructors explain the mechanics of movement and the physics of each technique. If they simply tell you to imitate them then you will never understand what you are doing.**
- Instructors should be able to demonstrate one or more lethal applications for any technique in a kata, unfortunately many were only taught some watered-down explanation for a technique or some symbolic interpretation. EVERY technique in a kata is for combat purposes. The ancient masters did not waste time or motion with fluff or superfluous techniques. To gain a better understanding of the concept of Bunkai (interpretation of kata), read my book or buy a copy of “The Way of Kata” by my friends Lawrence Kane and Kris Wilder. This book explains the REAL purpose of martial arts kata which 99% of commercial instructors are never taught.**
- Treats students with respect and encourages with positive motivation.**
- Love teaching martial arts and never tire of teaching.**
- Continue to improve their knowledge, skill and ability.**

Understanding Martial Arts Styles

There literally hundreds of martial arts styles originating in countries like Korea, Japan, China, Burma, the Philippines, Okinawa, Brazil and others. At the core of all of the many styles from each of these countries is an approach toward self-defense. (Remember what I said earlier? Martial Arts are about survival). The differences are typically in the general types of techniques that are emphasized in a given style. The founder or creator of a given style developed his style based on some philosophy of defense. Different styles were developed with different influences from their creators.



A deep Kung Fu back stance

Some styles are based on animal or insect movements that gave clues to their creators about different styles of movement and defensive tactics. Other styles are based on a philosophy of attack and defense that is built upon by an assortment of techniques intended to defend against certain types of attacks against various

types of weapons. The next section describes how some of these styles have evolved into martial arts organizations and what some of the philosophical differences are between styles.

The important thing to take away from this is that there is no one style that is better than another. It all depends upon the self-defense situation, the skill level of the defender and the choice of techniques used in a defensive situation. Do not be fooled by school owners or masters who get involved in heated debates about who's style is best. They are all art forms. Go to an art gallery and decide which painting is the best. It is all a matter of opinion and perspective. I would simply encourage you to study a little bit about several common styles and learn about their general types of techniques and training methods. Different styles are sometimes better suited to different physical builds of people, but this is not always the case. Hit the internet and learn a little before you commit to a style or school. You'll feel more comfortable about your decision once you do choose a school.

Martial Arts Organizations and Associations

There are many martial arts clubs, associations and organizations in existence today. Many of these organizations function as the caretakers of their various styles and keep close watch over the teaching of these styles and the standards of performance and advancement.

It is important for students to understand the importance and the role that these organizations play in the martial arts world. To better understand the structure and role of these organizations it is useful

to step back for a moment and consider the evolution of martial arts systems.

From the first time that primitive man discovered that he could stick his foot out and trip an adversary, fighting and martial techniques have evolved. The martial systems that we study today are largely derived from systems that were developed by individuals. These individuals developed systems of self-defense, gave them names, refined them and began to teach them to others. Students of these instructors were the proving ground for these martial systems and the masters continued to refine, innovate and evolve their systems and styles. As the systems developed into maturity, various ranking schemes evolved with most of them. Students were identified by their rank and instructors could gauge their ability even without personally knowing the student. As more curriculum came into being, higher ranks were possible. Students who stayed with a master for a long enough time could rise in rank and skill as the master's own skill expanded and the curriculum with it.

Various systems adopted sophisticated philosophical and spiritual bases upon which they built their techniques, strategies and customs. Like any family tree, the martial arts family tree has many branches in many countries. Each time a senior instructor would leave a master, he would go to another location, teach what he had learned and in many cases modify, innovate and adapt his original system into a variant of what he had mastered. In some cases, major innovations came into existence by the hard work, analysis and creative insight of masters who devised systems that were significantly different from what they had originally learned.

Morehei Ueshiba, the founder of Aikido (meaning “Harmony Way”) built his system based on the philosophy that he respected his opponent and therefore wished no harm to his adversary. The original techniques that he developed caused no permanent harm to the adversary. There were no strikes or kicks that would inflict damage that would prevent an opponent from recovering after a time and coming back to continue an assault. I believe that philosophy, although honorable, is not a practical basis for a robust system of self-defense. Opponents will get up and return to the fight, at least until the defender has shown through enough attempts that he is impervious. Conversely, the general strategy in Kenpo Karate is to cause maximum damage in a complete flurry of devastating techniques. These styles of martial arts are on opposite ends of the force continuum.

Later variations of Aikido began to incorporate some number of simple kicks and strikes for use on a limited basis for persistent attackers. Later students of Ueshiba and his son developed these variations and they are now part of the martial family tree.

Tae Kwon Do and all of the other major and minor systems of martial arts have evolved, branched and morphed into a myriad of flavors all having some common elements. It is part of the martial tradition for a senior student to leave his master, go on his own, reflect and adapt and hopefully devise some useful innovations or potentially even introduce a radically new style or system. This keeps the arts dynamic, vibrant and growing.

In modern times, along with the development of new styles and systems comes the evolution of martial arts organizations and

associations. These organizations charge membership and testing fees and provide some degree of quality assurance over their domain. Students derive a sense of legitimacy by receiving black belt certifications. Aside from revenue generation for the leaders of the organizations, certification and rank testing are usually promoted as providing acceptance for the students. If you obtain a black belt from organization "A", then you will be recognized anywhere that organization has a school or club. The problem with the recognition or certification is that many organizations refuse to recognize each other. These organizations typically require students to re-test on material that is very similar.

Often one organization may look upon black belts from another similar organization as being illegitimate. There are politics and egos involved and many organizations have come into being simply because the leadership of one organization had a falling out or fundamental differences so a divergence occurred and several new organizations then came into existence.

Another inconvenient feature of the organizations is that they periodically make subtle changes in the curriculum and the expected way in which the students are to perform the material. This is solely for requiring instructors to attend teaching seminars and to act as a control mechanism so that the organization maintains control over its affiliate schools. There are no practical, martial reasons for example, in changing how many Kihaps (yells) there are in a pattern, or on which moves they are to occur. This keeps instructors and students on their toes with useless and frivolous changes where time could be better spent focusing on the

Bunkai (practical combat application), which most organizations do not teach or even know.

What are the advantages of these modern martial arts organizations? There is robust curriculum; however, lacking it may be in specific focus on self-defense. These organizations are prevalent, instruction is usually consistent, and instructors do receive thorough training, which improves the student's experience. However, these martial organizations are highly politically charged often with much in-fighting. Self-defense and street survivability is often covered as more of an afterthought or an adjunct to the traditional curriculum, whereas if the focus were on the interpretation of the kata (Bunkai), then students would be learning what the movements of the patterns could do rather than learning to mimic a specific performance for purposes of passing a belt test. I have seen master-level classes where self-defense is not even discussed except in academic terms, not because there is any practical consideration of the need for it. The result, I believe, is students who are highly trained and tested in the tradition, etiquette, symbolic meanings and history of the kata and proper performance of techniques, but uneducated in the adaptation of these techniques and practical application for survival.



A view from the front entrance at United Karate. The weapons room is in the rear. The lettering stands for “People of the Dragon” signifying wisdom, maturity and restraint.

Martial Arts Schools: Physical Layout

Martial arts schools vary to some degree, but essentially a martial arts school is a big empty room. Some schools are nicer, cleaner and equipped with more accommodations than others. Some things that you may find or look for in a martial arts school are listed below.

Martial Arts School Accommodations

- Bathrooms**
- Showers**
- Padded floors or large floor mats for throws and ground fighting**
- Large mirrors so that you can see how your techniques look**

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- Weapons on racks (swords, bo-staffs)
- Computerized billing and record keeping
- A school web site
- Customized school uniforms, gear and sports apparel
- A pro shop
- Books or videos for the school's curriculum
- Weight equipment and other exercise equipment
- Saunas and tanning beds
- Handouts of the curriculum for each level
- School vans for after school pickup (some schools have after school programs where they will help students with their homework)
- Adequate seating in the lobby – you will be spending time waiting for your children. Make sure you have a place to sit.



A display case with United Karate jackets, sparring gear, curriculum videos, student manuals and other goodies!

The essentials are simply a clean, safe room and the basic kicking and punching pads. It is not necessary to have a sauna, tanning beds or a juice bar. You will pay for these extras as part of your tuition. This leads to my next point: Where to find martial arts schools.

Where to Find Martial Arts Schools

- Shopping malls**
- Strip malls**
- Universities**
- Asian book stores**
- Bulletin boards in martial arts supply stores**
- Churches**
- YMCA/YWCA**
- Community centers**
- Civic centers**
- Classified ads in newspapers**
- Yellow pages**
- Internet searches**
- Roadside signs**
- Word of mouth**
- Oriental restaurants**

Martial Arts Programs

Before we discuss different types of programs that schools offer, let's talk about how schools might be run. Here are some key aspects of how a school might be structured to operate:

- ❑ **Individual classes for children and adults (occasionally, though, ages might be combined once or twice per week particularly on Saturday's when the schedule is shorter.**
- ❑ **Flexible schedule. For example if you are a yellow belt your schedule should offer a variety of times so that you can pick the days and times that fit your schedule:**
 - **Monday 5PM**
 - **Tuesday 6PM**
 - **Wednesday 7PM**
 - **Thursday 8PM**
 - **Friday 5PM**
 - **Saturday 9PM**
- ❑ **For any given belt rank, the schedule will vary something like the example above so that no matter what rank you are, you will have some variability in your schedule.**
- ❑ **Free intro class: Some schools generally have some type of introductory offer to allow you to have two or three classes or more so that you can try it out to see how you like the school. Often the intro offer will include a free uniform. However, the free uniforms are generally very light weight and inexpensive, so don't expect that uniform to last long. Once you have decided to get serious about your studies you should invest in a medium-weight uniform. As you become more advanced you may want a heavy**

weight uniform simply because they stand up better to the type of treatment that you will be giving them.

- Some schools are also open on Sunday's, but that is much less common.**
- Open sparring or training sessions so that you can simply go and spar and workout. Ideally your school is large enough that maybe there is a second training room so that a class can be taking place in one room and other students can be practicing in another room.**
- Does your school actually have martial arts seminars by visiting martial artists? Many schools claim that is a benefit. A school that I belonged to for nine years claimed this and never offered a single seminar during the entire nine years! (and we inquired repeatedly)**
- Competition program: if you're into that**
- Separate self-defense classes that focus on realistic scenarios and training methods**
- Separate weapons classes (generally for students who have been training for at least a year)**
- Demonstration team or a competition team to go to tournaments and demonstrations**
- Programs for younger students ages 4-6 (Little Ninjas, Junior Dragons or something like that) Generally these are Karate-like classes where children will usually wear a uniform and maybe earn a white belt but not study and actual curriculum. These programs are generally intended as a feeder to the regular programs and allow younger children to begin to learn some basic martial arts concepts and activities.**

- ❑ **Generally it should be allowable to come in and practice whenever the school is open as long as there is a practice room or space toward the back of the main room to practice as long as you are not disturbing the class.**

Monthly: Pay as You Go

Monthly programs allow students to join and pay on a monthly basis without having to sign up for a one year or longer program. This provides flexibility so that if a student moves, changes schools or simply does not like the program a month or two into it; they are not stuck with a one-year membership. The disadvantage of this type of program is that over a longer period of time you will probably end up paying more than if you did sign up for a one year or longer program. There are always trade-offs.

If you sign up for some type of one year or longer program there will often be several payment methods:

- ❑ **Make an initial deposit followed by monthly payments until the program fee has been paid off. (interest will almost always be included)**
- ❑ **Make four equal payments four months in a row and the program is paid off. Obviously these four payments are larger than the 12 monthly payments mentioned above.**
- ❑ **One lump sum payment for the entire one year program. Usually some type of discount (10%) might be offered if you are paying in full.**

Contracts: What to Expect

The first rule of contracts is **READ BEFORE YOU SIGN!** If you are not clear about what every single sentence in the contract means, get clarification so that you understand what you are getting into. Reading after you sign is too late!

Contracts will be written to provide the most flexibility and benefit for the school versus the student. That's simply how the business works. Read every line carefully and ask questions if you do not understand. Look for late fees, testing fees, belt fees, uniform costs, sparring equipment or any other requirements that might be part of the program. Find out if your program has a set time limit, such as one year, if it is possible to freeze the program. In other words, you may want to stop the clock for a few weeks if you know you will be out of town, or you become sick or injured or maybe just want a break without losing the time you have purchased. Often a program will say, for example, that you have one year or until you reach the rank of Blue Belt, whichever comes first. So if you are super dedicated like some students I have had, and earn your blue belt in six months, then your program is over and you have to sign up for the next level. On the other hand, if you spend a year training and you have not reached blue belt yet, your program is over. Either way this situation favors the school more than the student.

At United Karate, we did the opposite to favor the student. You could sign up for blue belt and you either had one year or you could continue to train beyond a year until you reached your blue belt. This positive policy actually resulted in more students staying with the program and ultimately accomplishing blue belt and continuing

on to the black belt program. That is the goal of the school – retention of students. By favoring the students, you are actually favoring the school.

Schools will offer black belt programs and second degree black belt programs and masters or life programs. Each involves trade-offs which are based on whether you think you will stick with it or whether you are willing to make a long-term commitment. No one knows what the future holds. You may get transferred, become disabled, lose interest (ask if your program is transferable to another family member or someone else) or the school may go out of business. Not all martial arts schools are very financially stable. You will have to consider carefully which program suites your goals and tolerance for risk or uncertainty. (I sound like an investment advisor here, but that's what you're doing – making an investment).

Location, Location, Location

You've heard that saying before. What I mean by this is that there are many locations or places to find a martial arts school. You may find a school at the YMCA, or within a sports club or a county recreation center. Your school may be located within a local strip mall shopping center or inside of a larger enclosed mall. It really does not matter where it is located as long as it is in a safe neighborhood and is a clean, and reasonably spacious facility. I've already said this but it bears repeating, that you need to go watch several classes on several different occasions to see how they are run and how different instructors interact with students and how they control and motivate their classes.

Costs

Martial arts are an art form, but they are also a business. Someone has to pay to keep the lights on. That being said, there are a variety of ways that schools generate revenue and keep the cash flowing in. This is not a bad thing, but you need to be aware of the various costs that you will likely incur on your journey.

Martial Arts Costs and Fees

- Uniform (good idea to have two)**
- Sparring gear. Padded head gear, mouth guard, hand, feet, shins and chest guard.**
- Testing fee (each belt level may require a test fee before you can graduate to the next belt level. This is in addition to your regular membership or program fee.**
- Seminar fees (unless they are included in the program contract)**
- Weapons (advanced students often purchase practice weapons such as foam nunchukas, or wood or bamboo swords or rubber knife or wooden gun for self-defense practice.**
- Tournament or competition fees (not generally part of your school)**
- If your school is part of a national or international affiliation such as the U.S. Tae Kwon Do Federation, or the World Tae Kwon Do Federation, then there may be separate annual membership fees or testing fees. Inquire about these fees or see if these are included in the membership at your school.**

- ❑ **After school fees if you participate in one of these programs at the school.**

The Art of Shopping!

Now you are ready to begin your search. Below are a few key considerations when you visit a school:

Visiting the School

- ❑ **Be respectful and polite. Respect is the first lesson in martial arts. Without it learning cannot take place.**
- ❑ **Shake hands if an instructor offers to shake hands**
- ❑ **If someone bows to you, bow back out of respect .**
- ❑ **Call the school to find out if visitors are allowed to come and watch.**
- ❑ **If there are high-pressure sales tactics, you don't want to be there.**
- ❑ **Observe the classes quietly to show respect and not to distract the students or the instructors.**
- ❑ **Do not try to impress anyone with what you have learned about martial arts in your reading. Focus on learning what you can.**
- ❑ **Try to avoid discussing other schools you have visited; just focus on learning about the one you're in at the moment.**
- ❑ **Classes will vary greatly from day to day and from instructor to instructor. Go observe many classes at the schools that seem to be on your short list. Every instructor has a bad day once in a while so watch enough classes to get a good idea. You may show up on a day when they are**

teaching weapons or self-defense only. The more classes you watch the better sampling you have to make your judgment.

- Find out when enrollment is possible. Commercial schools will generally start any time. University programs or community centers will only start every six weeks or every semester. Check ahead of time.**

I spoke wrote earlier about various styles of martial arts. There are also various ways of training in a given martial art. Below is a list of potential training styles that you should ask about to determine if the school teaches in a manner that is within your comfort zone. On the other hand, martial arts is about leaving your comfort zone and stretching your abilities to achieve new heights! But here's the list anyway:

Training Styles

- Traditional – generally focusing on forms, kata, hyungs, poomse**
- Mixed Martial Arts – combination of various styles including boxing, grappling, wrestling and other striking arts – more or less the opposite of traditional**
- Sport Karate – involves light contact point sparring**
- Olympic-style – involves semi-contact**
- Full-contact – usually requires a tough personality and body**
- Self-Defense – focusing on realistic, practical street techniques without much study of an established martial art system**

School Atmosphere

- Are students and instructors respectful toward each other?
- Do the instructors appear to enjoy teaching or do they look like they can't wait for class to end?
- Do students appear to be enjoying themselves?
- Is the class fun but serious or is there too much joking around and silliness? It's ok to have some levity, but martial arts is a serious topic.
- Do instructors pay attention to details; teaching concepts as well as the mechanics of a technique?

Lesson Structure

- A typical martial arts school will begin and end their classes with instructors and students bowing to each other and toward the flags and then a recitation of a school creed that embodies the values or principles of the school or style. Generally black belts and instructors are to be addressed as Sir or M'am.
- Generally a class may begin with warm-ups, but more senior instructors may expect high-ranking students to show up already warmed up.
- After some period of warm-up and conditioning exercises there is often a period of stretching to increase flexibility and joint mobility.
- After stretches is the main part of the lesson, technique, drills, conditioning, self-defense, weapons, kata or even musical forms.

- Look for some variety in the class structure as you watch many classes.**



Qualities of a Martial Artist

A martial artist must learn about the following general topics:

- Origins and Traditions**
- Skill and Training**
- Strategy and Tactics**
- Spirit and Excellence**
- Success for Life**

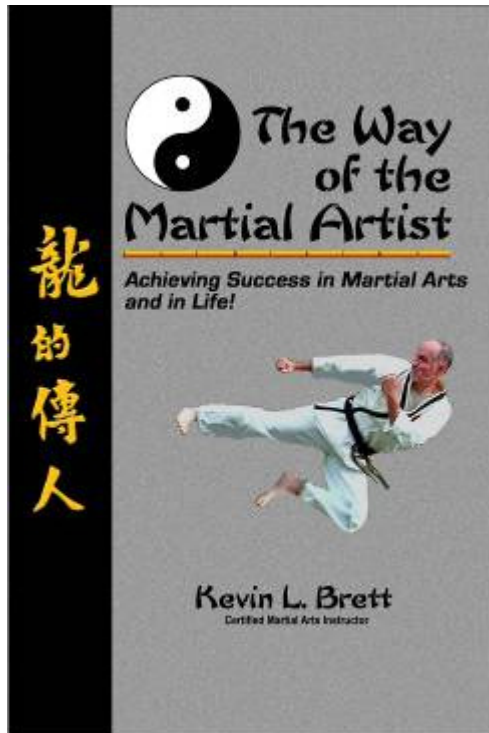
Within each of these general topic areas are dozens of sub-topics that make up the body of knowledge that a martial artist must learn and practice. It is a journey of a life-time and it can be life-changing. Martial arts really are about becoming what you were meant to be. Through martial arts training and the development of essential

How to Find the Right Martial Arts School for You!

qualities the potential for human development and achievement is unlimited!

Coincidentally the bullets above are the chapters of my book ***The Way of the Martial Artist: Achieving Success in Martial Arts and in Life!*** I would encourage you to buy a copy of this book from Amazon subsidiary CreateSpace through my web site www.KevinBrettStudios.com

I wish I had a book like this when I began my martial arts studies. I would have progressed faster and farther and that is why I wrote it for my students.



This book describes all of the essential qualities of a martial artist through each of the chapters above and explains what these skills, techniques, strategies and concepts are to help you become a

much better educated and enlightened martial artist. Feel free to go to my web site to read the actual Table of Contents, Foreward, Preface and Introduction.

The Best Style of Martial Art

I am always amused when I hear someone ask what is the best style of martial art. There is no best martial art. They are all intended to focus on self-defense. The key is whether or not your training really focused on the reality of combat and self-defense in realistic scenarios and settings or just on memorization of forms/kata/hyungs/poomse.

If you do a Google on "Bunkai" you will find that it is a Japanese term meaning interpretation of kata or forms. What 99% of martial arts schools teach in their kata is what really well versed martial artists refer to as the "B" knowledge. Basically, watered-down or made up explanations of how to use various movements from the kata. The kata or forms are simply the vocabulary of the given style. Like any language, you learn the vocabulary and basic structure and then you learn to write your own thoughts. In other words, on the street you would never jump in and begin to execute a green belt form, but you would use some of the moves from it (if you have studied the "A" knowledge through bunkai") to defend yourself.



A simple movement like a front-stance with a down-block is typically taught as blocking a roundhouse kick from your opponent. Try this for real and you will end up with a broken forearm. Which is stronger, your forearm or your opponent's shin? In reality a movement like that is intended to defend against someone who has grabbed your forearm. Step BACKWARDS, not forwards as you typically do in a kata, wrap around with the arm being grabbed and re-grab your opponent's forearm, while stepping back into your front stance, then down block against the back of their elbow as you drop your weight down suddenly into your front stance. The end result is your opponent has a broken or hyper extended elbow and will not be giving you any trouble for quite some time.

I realize this is difficult to visualize in written form, but the point is that every movement in a Tae Kwon Do form or any other form of any other style actually has three or four or many practical and

often lethal applications if you spend enough time learning from someone who knows the kata. So take the movements you already know and study their practical application before going into another style of martial art and repeating the same behavior.

As far as other styles however, there are some that do come across a little more intuitive in the self-defense arena: Hapkido, Ed Parker Style Kenpo Karate, Jiu Jitsu, Krav Maga, to name a few. But again, any style can be effective if you are taught effectively. It depends up on how much knowledge you have about how to use the techniques you have learned. You must learn about many topics which I cover in my book to be fully versed and prepared for self-defense whether it is in a parking lot or in Iraq. You must understand principles of camouflage, concealment and evasion. You must learn how to use your environment and terrain to your advantage. You must learn about weapons of opportunity; how to use what is at your disposal and within arm's reach to defend your self – and actually practice this vs. just reading about it. There are tactics and strategies and training methods that I discuss which will allow you to take what you have learned in the martial arts school and help you make it work in combat. That is the purpose of it all.

More important that any specific techniques are the proper knowledge, mindset and spirit. You must understand the real meanings of terms like timing and speed and how to isolate the difference between them in drills so that you can improve these qualities. You must develop a "survivor" mindset that also involves understanding of how you would truly react and what your triggers would be in a self defense situation. Where is your "line of conviction"? How far can someone push you before you react and

then where will you enter into the force continuum. When we were operating our martial arts school United Karate Institute of Self Defense, Inc. we had a slogan that said it all:

“If you can’t defend yourself . . . nothing else matters.”

Shopping Around

I have said many things about what to look for and what to expect from a martial arts school. There is no single school or instructor that will be perfect in every aspect. So do not think that because some aspects of a school, instructor or program may not meet every criteria perfectly that it is not a good school. Many schools will stack up about the same on any list of criteria or questions. Your goal is to become familiar with what can be expected so that you are a better educated consumer going into your martial arts experience. As you review this school-guide, visit schools and read about martial arts styles you will become better at being able to differentiate between different schools and eventually make a good choice in a school. Do not rush! Take your time so that you find a school that will really be right for you.

My experience has been that generally speaking many commercial schools are fairly similar in what they offer, what they cost and the quality of instruction that you receive. You will need to do a lot of study on your own as you should in any academic or artistic endeavor. Read books, buy videos, surf the internet and check out martial arts magazines. There is much to learn and you will not find

all of it at your school, but it should be your home base where you put into practice what you have learned. Do not rely on a single instructor to be your sole source of martial arts knowledge or training. There is too much out there to learn, experience and enjoy so don't limit yourself.



About the Author

Kevin Brett is a certified martial arts instructor with twenty years of martial arts training and teaching experience. He and wife Lana Kaye Brett were two of the five co-founders of the United Karate Institute of Self-Defense, Incorporated in Alexandria, Virginia. He has taught martial arts and street self-defense to local law enforcement, military and federal officers focusing on realistic and practical application of martial arts techniques. He has studied Tae Kwon Do, Jiu Jitsu, Kendo, Kenjutsu, Kenpo Karate, Shotokan, Aiki Do and many other styles to add to his diverse experience base.

He is the President/CEO of Kevin Brett Studios, Inc., and the author of *The Way of the Martial Artist: Achieving Success in Martial Arts*

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and in Life! Information and samples from this comprehensive martial artist's guidebook can be viewed at:

<http://www.KevinBrettStudios.com>

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