

# Choosing an Instructor

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I would like to discuss the subject of choosing an Instructor. There is much confusion of what being a Black Belt really means. Because of all the television and all the uncertified Black Belts or those claiming to be legitimate Black Belts teaching around these days, the true meaning of Black Belt has been greatly commercialized and watered down. To the unlearned public it is hard to tell a real Martial Artists from a fake one. Will the movies, books, and instruction manuals on the market today, many use these tools to teach and claim their Black Belt status. As with many professions, some of these fakes are very gifted and can make the public believe their false statements. Some will come from other cities, claim they are a certain rank and then get promoted and start their own school. Many times they start their own form of Karate and claim to be a higher rank than others.

## Steps to Determine a Legitimate Certified Black Belt

1. Do not be afraid to ask to see their credentials and certificate of rank. Ask for all copies of each rank they have received. If the Instructor is offended by your questions, that is a good sign that he / she may have something to hide. Beware!
2. Through 46 years of experience, I have found that no one style is better than another. Each Martial Art style has its own techniques and philosophies which all can benefit from. I teach the Korean style of Tae Kwon Do. Although I am very dedicated to the Art of Tae Kwon Do, my experience has shown me that it is not the style but the **Instructor** that is most important. When an Instructor claims that he / she has the best style and everyone else is no good, watch out! Most Instructors don't want you to visit other schools. That is a sign of insecurity on the Instructor's part. The Martial Arts teaches one to be secure and confident in themselves so this trait alone should make you wonder. Be aware when an Instructor constantly puts down other Instructors. Even though in some cases the allegations could be true (I have found in my 31 years in the Martial Arts most are not) there is an **Honor Code** in the Martial Arts handed down since the beginning of the Art. That is **NOT TO PUT OTHER BLACK BELTS DOWN** no matter what their feelings are. Life tells us that not everyone will agree with one another. The **Honor** and **Respect** of being a **Black Belt** was and is so revered and respected that no matter what the disagreements may be, **Respect** of the rank was always to be **Honored**. Instructors who continually claim they are the best and say that other Instructors are no good shows that they really haven't yet learned the true meaning of the Martial Arts.
3. Although it is proper to charge fees for lessons, be sure that the money is not the only important thing to the Instructor. In American terms, a 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup> Degree Black Belt is the equivalent to a Bachelor's Degree. 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Degree would be considered a Master's Degree. 7<sup>th</sup> Degree and up are considered a PhD or Doctorate Degree of the highest **Honor**. Consider this when searching for a school to train at. Don't get me wrong, the highest rank Instructor is not always the best. But if his

- credentials are legitimate, it should be taken under serious consideration. An Instructor should always allow the first lesson free, not demand a contract to be signed, not require a uniform or other equipment to be bought until the student sees they are going to stay training. Any good Instructor will work with the student or family concerning the financial end. **Remember: Price** does not determine the quality of teaching!! Although I do feel that the Instructor deserves to be paid for his teachings, a good Instructor is more concerned for the welfare of their student than how much money they will get. Keep this in mind when choosing an Instructor.
4. The Martial Arts is a **Discipline** not a **Dictatorship**! Beware of those Instructors who think they are larger than life. **Respect** and **Discipline** are very important in the learning of the Martial Arts but many Instructors turn their leadership into **Power, Control, and Ego / Conceited Attitude** which are not virtues of the Martial Arts. There are many Instructors out there who use wrong ideas to make themselves look good. Many claim to be the toughest. There is always someone better and the amount of trophies one has does not necessarily make them a good Instructor. This is not the Martial Arts and its true meaning. Watch the Instructor teach. Many times to the unlearned an Instructor can seem hard. Don't be afraid to ask questions. A good Instructor looks at the end result when teaching and to learn the Martial Arts properly takes a long time. In fact, you can never learn all there is to learn. When someone says this, they truly don't understand the Martial Arts.
  5. Be aware when an Instructor claims to guarantee that in so much time a person will be able to defend themselves. In my 31 years, I have found that everyone is different. Personalities, age, abilities, physical attributes, mental capabilities, desire, dedication are just a few of many things that determine the progress of a student. The philosophy of the Martial Arts is that it is for **Everyone**! Being that each person is an individual, everyone is different. So when an Instructor guarantees results in a determined amount of time, watch out!
  6. An Instructor should always welcome visitors and parents to watch classes. When they don't I would question what they are teaching the students. Being a parent myself, I would want to know what my child is being taught. A lot of Instructors don't like the parents watching or asking questions. This is only showing their insecurity which is not a quality of a good Instructor.
  7. An Instructor will demand discipline but a good Instructor will always show the students he / she truly cares that they become the best they can be. The Martial Arts is a way of life and the Instructor should realize that they also are still learning. The student should not **Fear** the Instructor, but **Respect** the Instructor.

In ending, choosing a Martial Arts Instructor is not an easy thing to do. There are many schools out there. Most are good in their own ways. Don't stop at one school. Shop around. It is your life, your children's', and your money. You have a right to seek out the school that best fits your needs.

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