

Kick Defenses

Kicks are taught in many martial arts to be used in offensive ways. Many martial arts and sports have techniques that match their philosophy. Hapkido approaches kick defenses from a fairly eclectic philosophy, and techniques seen in number of different arts. The choice of defense will depend as much on the defender's stance, clothing, as the kick that is being defended against.¹



Figure 1

Kick defenses will be one of three types: defenses that block the kick, block the momentum, or continue the momentum. For the purposes of kick defenses, it is useful to note that kicks are either a linear attack (front, side, ax) or circular attack (round house, spin kicks). Most kicks will have both linear and circular motion that may be taken advantage of, depending on the stage of the kick. For instance, most circular kicks have an early linear element as the weight shifts forward onto the support leg. Linear kicks also have circular elements. Front kicks are linear in that they don't move through a horizontal plane, but are also circular as the hips, knee, and foot follow an arc as the leg is brought forward and up during the kick (see Figures 2a-2c, below). Turning-side and back kicks begin with a circular movement as the hips and torso rotate around and are then linear as the leg chambers and extends.

Classify kick defenses in your mind as you practice: Is the kick linear or circular or a combination of both? How is the kicker's momentum shifting during the course of the kick? Classifying kick defenses will help you to understand the underlying theory and basic motions

¹This paper was originally written as a guide for a Hapkido black-belt candidate.

of each technique. Understanding -and lack of practice!- are the greatest barriers to **the successful demonstration of kick defenses.**



Figure 2a



Figure 2b



Figure 2c

Figure 2, Illustrating the circular movements of a front kick.

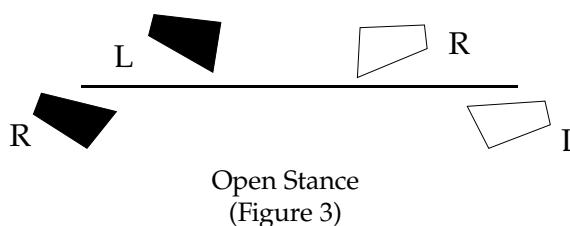
Definitions

Martial arts terms are often used in different **and contradictory** ways or are used as jargon within a small population. Below I have defined many of the terms used throughout this paper in order to provide a common base from which the kick defenses can be specifically explored. Please use the terms as described even though your understanding of the term may be different.

Open Stance vs. *Closed Stance* - Partners **standing** in opposite stances from each other **are** in an open stance. If partner "A" is left-foot forward fighting stance,

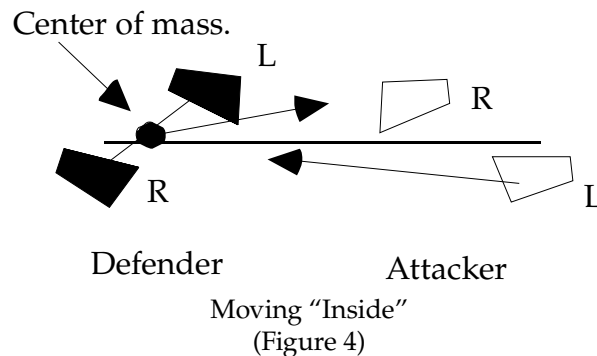
Kick defenses require quick movement. **As a result**, there is generally insufficient time to take complete "steps" forward, which require transferring weight from one leg to another and rotating the body's center of mass. **Unless otherwise specified**, the kick defenses described below use a sliding motion instead of a full step: moving forward by **driving** off the rear leg and not switching stances **from** left-to right-foot forward or vice versa.

partner "B" should be in a right-foot forward stance **as in Figure 3**. In a closed stance, partners are both in the same stance, e.g., both are left-foot forward fighting stance.

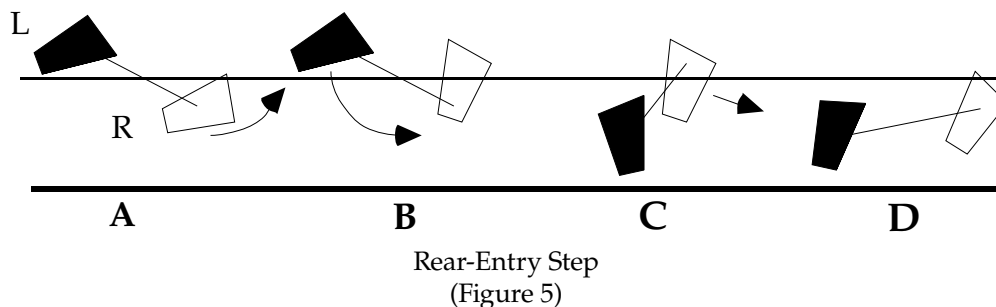


Moving Inside vs. *Moving Outside* - Moving to the "inside" refers to moving towards the attackers ventral side or front, and "outside" refers to moving to the back or dorsal side of the kicking motion. In Figure 4, the attacker (**on the right**) kicks with the left foot, while the defender (**left**) moves forward and to the left,

towards the attackers inside **or front**. The angle between the line that originally connected the partners' centers' of mass and the defender's vector of movement is rather small, approximately 15° . Conversely, if the attacker is instead in a left-front stance and attacks with a turning or spinning kick (kicking with the right leg), "**moving inside**" would then mean moving within the arc of the kick and towards the defender's backside.



Rear-Entry Step- This step is slower than the sliding movement but allows the defender to cover more distance and make greater use of sweeps and throws. Most defenses described below will not require this "extra" distance, although significantly smaller defenders (relative to their attacker) may find this step more necessary. In Figure 5, the defender (a) begins in a right fighting stance, (b) pivots towards the inside off the front foot while (c) stepping behind and off the original line connecting the attacker and defender's center of mass with the left foot, then (d) transfers weight to the left foot and drives forward so the right foot can extend forward. At this point the right foot may be used to sweep, or may plant to provide a base for a left leg sweep.



Hard Blocks Vs. Soft Blocks- The distinction between hard and soft blocks is probably a topic in itself. A simple distinction can be discerned as follows: Hard blocks will generally utilize a block moving perpendicular to the vector of the attack

it is blocking and are effective when they disrupt the motion of the attack, which usually also has the effect of moving the striking implement out of the defender's immediate reach. Soft blocks often redirect the striking implement through the course of the attack rather than at one distinguishable moment, thereby diffusing the attack while keeping the striking implement available for grabbing.

The Techniques

I. Evade and Counter-strike

"Evade and Counter-strike" techniques are the simplest of the kick defenses. Largely, the techniques in this section involve moving off the vector of attack, whether moving closer (to the inside or outside), farther away, or below **the plane of** the kick. They are then followed by a counter technique that in many cases may be unrelated to the original attack. These defenses should not require supporting the partner in any way, whether to execute the technique or protect the partner.

- **All kicks:** Many kicks can be defended against by attacking the kicking leg. For front and side kicks, attack the lower leg with a palm heel strike or **closed fist**. For the lateral motion of roundhouse kicks, close to the inside and strike the quadriceps **area** (thigh) rather than the **more hazardous** lower leg.
- Circular kicks:

- A) Pivot away and drop beneath the plane of a **mid- to high-section** kick and execute a low spin heel kick or turning side kick from the floor. Alternatives include a dropping-side kick (imagine sliding feet-first into home base while executing a side kick with the top leg), or dropping side kick with a leg trap (hook the sliding, **lower** foot behind the attacker's support leg while striking with the upper leg).



Dr. Link's low-spin heel defense to a kick
(Figure 6)

- B) Begin in an open stance to defend against a round-house or in a closed stance against spin-heel kick. **Move inside the kick and about 15° off the initial line and, using the**

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rear leg, execute a low round-house kick to the

knee area. Lifting the arm on the side of the kicking leg will protect the head against any errant counters the attacker may throw.

C) Begin in an open stance to defend against a high roundhouse kick. **Duck under the plane of the kick** and simultaneously guide the kick over and past with front hand. Follow with any strike, kick or sweep towards opponent's back side. **Spin-heel kicks may also be defended against in this manner.** Beginning from a closed stance is more dangerous as the attacker can compensate and drop the kick onto the defender's head.

- Linear kicks:

Ax kick can be defended against by attacking the support leg with a roundhouse or side kick, as in B, above.

High side kicks can be defended against using a turning side kick from the floor, a dropping side kick, or a low spin-heel kick, as in C, above.

II. Block and Counter-strike

These defenses should not require supporting the partner either to execute the technique or protect the partner, except to add techniques as described below.

- For this class of techniques, begin by **evading the attack** (moving laterally and closer/farther) while executing a block (hard or soft), and then counter-attack with an appropriate technique. The key to an effective counter-attack is proper distancing. Often, the close proximity to the attacker will require use of either low kicks or hand strikes. Be sure the techniques are thrown effectively, and not just thrown! For extra creative points, add joint-locks or judo-style throws by attacking areas that are not necessarily related to the specific attack used.
- Round house: Defending against low- or mid-section roundhouse kicks, shin blocks may be used. Be sure to either drop weight forward into the block **and**/or drive forward off the support leg, using the front of the shin and not the outside of the thigh to block. (When the thigh absorbs the blow in this contracted position, it is more likely to incur severe cramping.) It is advisable to augment the block with the forearm. Use the arm on the same side as blocking leg, bringing the elbow down and inside of the leg until the elbow overlaps the knee

while keeping the forearm more or less vertical. This will add surface area to the block in the event the kick comes higher than anticipated. Follow with a hand strike as the weight continues to shift forward.



Instep kick to back of knee.
(Figure 7)

- Front kick- From a closed stance, in-to-out down block the kick and move towards the **outside** (again, move only 10-15° off the center line). Major outer reap the attacker's support leg or with an instep kick from the leading or outside leg reap the attacker's support leg (Figure 7, right). It is more important to block the attacker's forward momentum when moving towards the inside to obtain the optimal angle desired for the throw.

III. Block, Trap and Strike

These defenses require lightly supporting the attacker in order to maintain the target for striking. The blocks used here are not "hard" blocks, but are softer and are used with the intention of redirecting the attack. The support required increases from front to side to ax.

- Front kick: Retreat while executing an x-block (see Figure 8, at right), trap the kick between the out-stretched hands, add a slight pull, and follow up with a front snap kick to the attacker's groin.



X-Block
(Figure 8)

- Side kick:
 - A) The defender should close **in** on the attacker while blocking either with the rear hand or a transfer block (front **blocks and transfers** to back hand). Moving towards the attacker's outside is easier, and be sure to aim the block to begin towards the back of the knee to avoid the heel. After

blocking, the defender should maintain contact between the blocking arm and the kicking leg until the defender is holding the kicking leg from the underside **with the rear hand**. Primary strikes include lead-leg side kick to the support leg and elbow/palm-heel strikes to the kicking (held) leg (Figure 9, right).



Block, Trap & Strike
(Figure 9)

- B) From a closed stance, the defender should block using the front hand and support the attacker's kicking leg while spiraling backwards towards the defender's own back side. At this moment, the defender's legs are crossed and she is nearly squatting under the attacker's outstretched leg. Reap the attacker's support leg with the original rear hand, sweeping from front to back.
- Ax Kick: Close in on the attacker and execute an upper x-block just as the kick reaches peak height. Execute the block while the attacker's weight is moving up to effectively block the forward momentum of the kick. Counter strike with low side kick or snap kick to groin.
 - Circular kicks: Not recommended.

IV. Block and Throw: The amount of support required is different for each type of defense. The two circular defenses and the linear defense blocking the forward momentum require supporting the partner only to protect the partner from a "hard" fall, but isn't necessary with someone who can take it (the problem is whiplash—tuck well!). Defenses against linear kicks which continue the momentum require controlling the attacker's weight in order to execute the technique and protect the partner.

- **Circular kicks-**

- A) Close on the attacker, moving away from the kick and inside the arc of the attack while executing a Y-block (see Figure 10, below).^{2*} The Y-block should not passively receive the kick. Rather, it should extend out until contact is made, almost striking at the kick. As the block collapses, wrap the appropriate arm around the kicking leg to assert control and execute the defense. As the kick moves through the arc, pivot on the front foot towards the back side in one fluid motion until the attacker's support leg is blocked by the front, pivot foot, and the attacker continues to rotate until falling onto her back. In Figure 11, Dr. Susan Link is shown attacking with a spin-heel kick and Master Norman Link.



Y-Block
(Figure 10)

^{2*} I prefer front hand high and rear hand low to free the front hand to strike as I come through (or grab to reduce the fall's force), while others may prefer the reverse- especially when their limbs are long enough to move out of range of a counter strike.

defends by moving inside the arc of the kick and executing the defense as described above.

B) See Linear kick defense (IV) C., below.



Master N. Link executes defense
(IV) B against Dr. S. Link
(Figure 11)

- **Linear kicks-**

Blocking the forward momentum:

- C) Begin in an open stance for front, round house, or ax kicks and closed stance for spin or turning kicks. As soon as the kick begins, slide straight inside and redirect the kick with **the** rear hand, blocking the forward movement of the attacker's center of mass with the front arm and hip and positioning the front leg behind the attacker's support leg. As the defender's momentum continues forward, the attacker is reaped and falls backwards (relative to the attacker's original orientation). **This defense uses three points of contact between the attacker and defender, though the**

throw can be executed using any two: the leg for reaping, and the hips and head/upper torso to block momentum. Try for all three to increase the chances of success. This technique doesn't work well for side kick.

Continuing the momentum forward:

- D) Front kick, forward throw- Beginning in either open or closed stance, redirect the front kick while maintaining the forward momentum of the kick. Begin a rear-entry step with the rear foot, then drive off the rear leg to move the front leg across the defender's path. Maintain a hold on the kicking leg, pulling it into your body while driving forward with the shoulder (similar to Judo's forward body drop throw). Attacker can either face fall or, with enough support from the defender, roll forward.
- E) Ax kick, forward throw- Same as the front kick forward throw (IV) D., except: execute an x-block and as the weight of the kick begins to drop, move either inside or out under the arc of the kick. A forward roll can be forced by the defender driving the shoulder of the primary blocking arm under the attacker's thigh. This should be similar to Judo's shoulder throw (bracing off the leg instead of the attackers arm/shoulder).
- F) Round house, forward throw- Defending against a mid- to high-section round-house kick, begin in a closed stance. Close into the attacker's inside while executing a Y-block above the knee of the attacker's kicking leg. As the weight begins to cross the center, pivot on the front foot, stepping behind with the rear leg until the attacker is forced into a forward roll or even face fall. Assuming a right-side round-house kick, imagine the attackers leg moving in the shape of an "S", where the block melts in and begins to redirect after the first curve, then pulls the attacker's center of mass through the second curve.
- G) Front or side kick, rear throw- The premise behind this throw is to continue the forward momentum by continuing the upward arc of the kick (see Figures 2a, 2b, and 2c on page 3) so the defender rotates about her center of mass in the vertical plane (compared to horizontally, as in the previous defense). Begin in either an closed or open stance. Use a rear hand (or a transfer) block and move toward the attacker, but at

approximately a 15° angle away from the center line. As the rear hand moves under the kicking leg, continue the **upward** circular motion, raising the kicking leg **up** and towards the attacker's head. The front hand can be used to strike the head area or to support the attacker during the fall. Using the front leg, sweep the attacker's support leg. This can be used to throw the attacker either backwards (relative to the attacker) or to the side towards the defender (as in Figure 12). To throw the attacker away, **step instead in front of the support leg before reaping**. **The** attacker may either face fall or with sufficient support, roll forward.



Sweeping the support leg.
(Figure 12)

In Conclusion

Kick defenses are very difficult techniques to master. Practice should start by repetitively walking through the techniques, beginning slowly and eventually gaining intensity. Other drills in which kick defenses can be safely practiced include 2-2's sparring and Four-Corner practice.

2-2's Sparring: A sparring drill where partners exchange techniques, **it is** designed to teach how to gauge distance and how to put together combinations. In this case, the practice can be amended to defend against kicks that are part of a combination. This practice should be relatively safe if both partners protect each other.

Four-Corner's Drill: Four partners (can also be **three** or **five**) stand in a **regular geometric shape (square, triangle, etc.)** facing the defender in the middle. One at a time, the partners attack with various techniques, in this case kicks. Having partners who kick differently and are attacking at various angles should provide effective practice. This drill can also be used for any other specific attack, or opened up to all types of attacks, depending on the purpose.

Finally, kick defenses can be attempted in the uncontrolled situation of “free sparring”. Hapkido practices free sparring without any rules, except that both

you and your partner should always be able to walk away uninjured. However, even if partners exercise reasonable control, these are dangerous techniques to attempt in a reality-based exercise. Not only does the defender endanger him or herself by closing into an attack (the safest place is far, far away...), but endangers the attacker who may fall or twist in an unexpected manner and suffer a neck injury or joint dislocations.