

Drills for Teaching Self Defense on the Ground

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INTRODUCTION

In this paper I suggest ways to use repetitive drills and training competitions to teach students how to defend themselves on the ground. It is aimed more at teachers than students, and I assume the reader has a basic understanding of the mechanics and tactics of wrestling, including pins, joint locks, strikes and escapes.

My goal is to suggest drills that work in three different areas of ground-fighting — defense, offense, and getting up. These divisions are somewhat arbitrary, but they are helpful in thinking about fighting on the ground and teaching it.

What I won't do in this paper is teach particular wrestling or fighting techniques. I'm just outlining a way of teaching them to sharpen students' self-defensive reflexes. Obviously, as a teacher you must know how to teach individual techniques and answer questions from students. Your job is to present the different techniques to students in a way that makes sense.

As a teacher you have to consider the goals of your class (a self defense class will be very different from a sport judo session on *newaza*), the abilities of your students (are they fit, aggressive athletes or middle

aged people who haven't exercised in years?), and your own comfort in teaching and expertise in the subject.

Obviously, this is just one possible way to structure a class or unit. Ground-fighting is just one part of self defense, and must be put in context.

This paper is about self defense, not competitive wrestling. It's not about long, sweaty, technical rounds of wrestling that unfold, move by move, like chess games. While wrestling is fun and is great exercise and is a worthy skill to learn in and of itself, in the context of self defense, wrestling is about escaping from an attacker or attackers and getting away.

Complex and subtle techniques, like those taught in judo and jujitsu, are not usually appropriate for self defense. Such techniques often require time and subtle strategy to work, and their complexity makes them hard for students to learn unless they spend a long time wrestling. While I think it would be a great start for self defense students to spend a couple of terms in judo class just getting comfortable on the ground, that isn't always possible.

Here are five basic principles to remember when teaching self defense on the ground.

Keep it simple

Your teaching should be founded on this principle. Ask yourself at each stage of lesson planning if you're teaching a concept or technique in the simplest, clearest way. You're teaching students to fight, not to win a competition. Combat is terrible, swift and frightening, so students need basic, effective, reflexive techniques that they won't forget under stress.

You are teaching mules to finish the race

Always keep in mind the difference between an elite athlete and a self defense student. Competition classes in judo, taekwondo and jujitsu are where teachers train thoroughbreds to win the Kentucky Derby. Self defense class is where you teach mules to finish the race. Self defense techniques cannot require great muscular strength or incredible reflexes, or they will be useless for ordinary people in your class. Your techniques should be those that anyone can do.

Comfort on the ground

A self defense class can't be all about ground-fighting. But your students need to spend enough time on the ground to be comfortable there. The more time they spend doing drills and playing at free exercises on the ground, the more familiar it will be to them in a fight. As a teacher this means you must be patient and must budget enough time in your lessons for students to play on the ground and familiarize themselves with being there. As a general rule, give over half the time to drills, the other half to free play.

Training should be unfair

Don't handicap your students by making their training easy or fair. Pair them with heavier, stronger, meaner attackers. Have them fight against more than one opponent at a time. Give the attackers sticks or other weapons. Start them in terribly disadvantaged positions — face down, off balance, after being thrown. You want them to have an honest idea what they can and cannot do. Most people come into self defense class with ideas about fighting absorbed from

Hollywood movies. They have no idea what a real fight is like. Help them to understand that life is unfair. Use your imagination to dream up different scenarios and keep the class interesting!

Train the way you fight and fight the way you train

Be realistic. Do drills in shoes, in everyday clothes, on grass or cement or dirt. Have your students carry their purses or backpacks or hold bags of groceries. Here's another area ripe for your creativity and imagination!

Each of the three sections that follows, divided generally about the key organizational topics of defense, offense and escape, will suggest some drills or concepts clustered around a single, important point. The main point will be set off in bold, followed by one or more drills, set off in italics, based on that theme. Discuss the main point of each drill with your students, and make sure they understand it. Use your creativity and imagination in designing your own drills by developing new variations from those presented here. Keeping a class fresh requires innovation and change, but also a solid foundation.

DEFENSE

Keep the feet towards a standing attacker

On the ground, students must learn to keep their feet between themselves and a standing attacker in order to keep their head a safe distance away from the attacker. As soon as they hit the ground after being

thrown or knocked down, they need to move into this defensive position where they can kick with either or both feet to keep their attacker at bay.

Simple position drills

Start with simple position drills, for example, *Defender on the ground, Attacker standing*. Defender pivots in a sitting position and tries to keep their feet between themselves and the circling, lunging attacker. Don't let the attacker strike at first; just have them circle and try to slip in close enough to touch the defender on the head with their hand. Let the students figure out on their own how to balance on their tailbone to pivot effectively.

Try these drills on grass, dirt or cement and you will open your students' eyes a little more. Add complexity to the drill by giving the standing attackers a weapon like a foam club that extends their reach. Let them hit the defenders with it. Defenders must turn and try to keep the attackers away with kicks. Feel free to add more than one attacker to frustrate students and give them a wake-up call when they start to feel bored or overconfident with the drill.

Throwing and landing drills

The next drill begins when the *Attacker throws the Defender to the ground*. Defender must immediately twist or roll into defensive position with feet between themselves and the attacker. Start with gentle throws and falls, then move up to hard or unusual ones. Have attackers throw the defenders harder as the drills progress. You want your students to fall in as many positions and weird ways as possible. Use a gymnastics crash pad for hard or unorthodox falls.

For an alternative drill, *begin rounds of wrestling with a throw*. Set goals for the defender — they must not be pinned or forced to submit in 30 seconds after being thrown, or they must protect themselves and get up to their feet within 30 seconds. Shorten the time interval to 20 seconds, then 15, in order to drive home the point that students must get up as quickly as possible. In general, when teaching self defense, keep wrestling rounds shorter than 30 seconds to break students of the habit of hanging out in a particular position. This habit can be useful in long tournament rounds where players need to rest and conserve strength or analyze and then counter their opponent's tactics, but it is not so helpful in a fight where the object is to escape as quickly as possible.

Add attackers

Have one attacker throw the defender to the ground in front of a second attacker, or into a ring of several attackers. The defender must protect themselves and escape from the ring. If the defender doesn't fail most of the time, then the drill isn't working right.

Tire the defenders out

Before starting the drill, have the defender do 100 jumping jacks as fast as they can, or have them spin until they are very dizzy. Then have their partner throw them and start the drill. Do these drills until the students automatically roll into a defensive position as soon as they hit the ground.

Push an attacker away with the feet

The primary time to use this technique is against an

attacker who is lying atop the defender or attempting to come in and pin the defender, rather than standing and trying to kick them. The general principle is the same as for the previous group of drills — teach your students to keep their legs and feet between themselves and the enemy.

Getting attacker into guard drills

Start drills from all possible pins and positions — use your imagination. Give defenders a goal. Within 30 seconds they must bring their knees and then feet between themselves and the attacker. Get into guard position and then shove the attacker away with the feet. Shorten the interval to 20 seconds, then 15. Emphasize quickness. Repeat many times to build reflexes.

Begin the drills from all the pins you know — mount, scarf-hold, side holds, four-corner holds — and then be cruel and creative. Start the defenders face down, or upside down (put them in a headstand and start the drill from that position, as though they were in the middle of falling on their head).

Build again to **throwing and landing drills**. This time, have the attacker throw the defender and try immediately to pin them. The defender must get the attacker in their guard and push or kick them away in 30 seconds, then 20, then 15.

Protect head, airways, groin and other targets

Students need to defend against an attacker hitting them from the mounted position or other pins. They must understand how to protect their most vital areas, particularly to keep from being knocked unconscious.

Remind them that if they are choked out or hit and knocked unconscious, they will be completely helpless and unable to defend themselves at all.

Blocking, covering and trapping drills

Start with training on how to trap an attacker's arms and roll them off. Give the attacker boxing gloves and have them punch the defender while mounted on top. Give the defender 30 seconds and a goal — block, trap an arm or both arms, then bridge and roll the attacker off. Shorten the interval to 20 seconds, then 15 or even 10. Emphasize that the defender cannot afford to stay down and be hit.

Turn defender over, face down. This should be very difficult. Make sure they cover their airways and try to escape immediately. Have them try to catch or lock up the attacker's leg and immediately buck and roll them off. Keep drills short to emphasize the need for an immediate and swift reaction in such a dangerous situation. Remind them that doing something — anything — at once is better than waiting too long to figure out the best thing to do.

Put defender in a ring of attackers and have them curl into a fetal position covering their head and airways. Have attackers strike with foam clubs or other weapons. Defender has to get up and escape the ring. This drill should be nearly impossible. Explain to students how much harder it would be if attackers were wearing shoes and kicking them. Ask them to think seriously about what it would be like to be knocked unconscious in the center of a ring of people who were kicking them or stomping on them. Use fear to keep your students' ideas realistic.

Seated hand blocking drills

Try **seated hand blocking drills** using suspended, swinging heavy bags. Put one student under each bag, sitting up with their knees bent and feet lightly touching the ground. Their head and torso should be directly under the point the bag hangs from, so they constantly have to keep it away during the drill. Start the bag swinging so that it falls inward and hits the student in the head unless they block. They must pivot and use hands and forearms to block and protect their head from the strikes. Run these drills for 30 or 45 seconds, and for advanced students feel free to make them longer, up to 90 seconds. They teach good blocking and blending skills, and they're an excellent workout for the abdominal muscles, as the students have to keep their upper bodies erect during the drill.

These drills are similar to the **power kicking drills** described below, and can be combined with them or alternated in a series. Remind students always of the danger of hurting their elbows if they lock out an arm just before a bag swings against their hand.

To make these drills harder, have someone hold the swinging bag at the end of its arc and shove it quickly towards the defender, or send it in an unexpected direction. Just catching the bag and changing its timing will force the seated defender to think and react more quickly. Consider having three people stand in a triangle around the swinging bag to catch it and shove it.

Throwing drills

You can also have standing attackers throw things at defenders on the ground. Use tennis balls to simulate

rocks. To introduce an idea of pain into the drills, have someone count each hit with a “rock” during the drill. Have defenders do 10 push ups for each hit they take during the fight.

OFFENSE

*The best defense is a good offense,
and I intend to start offending.*

— James T. Kirk

Control opponent with body weight and leg power

Students must learn to instinctively use their whole body weight and the power of their legs to pin and control an opponent. They need to understand that their legs are their most powerful limbs, and to automatically use them to maximize their strength in a struggle on the ground. You can use examples from other sports to emphasize leg power. In rock climbing, for example, we are taught to use our legs to climb, not our arms, because legs are much stronger and we won't exhaust ourselves as fast. Or simply have your students punch and then kick a heavy bag to show how very much more powerful the legs are than the arms.

Make sure your students learn the basic body position, geometry, and dynamics of the major pins: scarf hold, mount, guard, four-corner holds. Use medicine balls or detached heavy bags or wrestling dummies to teach students to drive their hips down through the opponent and into the mat. Emphasize the dynamic nature of pins.

Basic pinning drills

Begin with **basic pinning drills**. Time students for 10, 20 and 30 seconds as they try to hold down an opponent struggling to escape. Make sure to pair them with a variety of partners — heavy and light, strong and weak.

Also, although it is important to be aware of gender issues in close-contact pins, it is important that female students learn to fight bigger, stronger men. So encourage men and women to pair up as partners, and always use both men and women when demonstrating techniques to the group.

Mobility drills

Use **mobility drills** to teach students to move from one pin to another in smooth sequence in reaction to their opponent's movements. These drills can be as simple as having one person pin the other until you shout "Change!" and they move to a different pin. Emphasize conservative movement and use of weight more than clenched muscles and strength. Your students should find out for themselves that if they clench their muscles they will quickly tire themselves out.

Another way to encourage students not to use their strength is to tire them out, first. Have them do 100 push ups and sit ups before you begin the drills. That will fatigue the particular muscles they most want to use in their arms. Then wind them with 100 jumping jacks as fast as they can do them, or with a set of burpees. It is also a good idea to tire students out with several rounds of unstructured wrestling before you teach drills emphasizing weight and position over

strength.

Test their instincts by having them spin until they're dizzy before doing some of the drills. Your eventual goal is to have them be able to pin and control an opponent even when they're dizzy and exhausted.

Throwing an opponent into a pin

Add onto the basic pinning drills by having the students start with a throw. They must throw their partner, pin them, and hold the pin for 10, 20 or 30 seconds, as before. Increase the difficulty of the drills as you go along. At first, tell the opponent being thrown not to resist much, so the thrower can learn the mechanics of moving directly into a pin. Then allow the person being thrown to struggle more, to resist being pinned. For advanced students, have the person being thrown try a takedown or escape as soon as they hit the mat.

Use a stopwatch and set goals for the drills. If the thrower hasn't gained control of the person they threw within 30 seconds, or 20, or 10, have them do pushups at the end of the round. This will reinforce the need to get control of a partner immediately upon going to the ground. Also, be creative and reverse the drills, so that the person being thrown has to gain control within the time limit.

Use a crash pad to practice judo competition-style throws where the thrower lands on the person being thrown, already in a pinning position when they land. Judo or wrestling throwing dummies are useful here, because they don't mind someone landing full force on their ribs or head.

Always be creative and use your imagination to

change the drills and keep your students from getting bored or falling into a rut.

Takedown to pin drills

One way to modify throwing drills is to make them into **takedown to pin drills**. First, teach your students the mechanics of basic takedowns where they are on the ground beneath or beside a standing attacker. Then run drills where they must take the opponent down, pin them and control them for 10, 20 and 30 seconds. As before, increase the opponent's resistance as you go along.

Have one partner then throw the other to the ground. The partner who was thrown must now execute a takedown and pin and control the person who threw them. This will train students to counterattack even as they are being thrown, and to react as soon as they hit the ground.

In all these drills, emphasize the use of weight and leg power to topple and subdue the enemy.

Superiority drills

Superiority drills are a lot of fun, and students tend to laugh and enjoy themselves because of the competition involved.

Have your students pair up and lie on the ground, each beside their partner. Have both lie on their backs, face up, their heads facing the same way. Make sure they are close enough so their shoulders touch. Clap your hands or shout "Fight!" and give the students a few seconds to fight for control. Make it short — you'll find that even 15 seconds is a long time once you try it. So give them just 10 seconds, and for advanced students shorten it to 5 seconds.

Start the fighting from as many different positions as you can think of — both face up but with their heads by their partner's feet; one face up and one face down, head-to-head and head-to-foot; both face down, etc. You want them to use their weight and leg power to subdue their opponent from all different positions they might land in during a fall to the ground.

These drills are good because even students with hardly any training can do them. A good way to proceed is to let the students try all the drills and then to ask them what they've learnt or what principles they discerned during the struggle. Ask them what they tried, what worked and what didn't.

Again, make sure to give your students different sizes, weights, shapes and temperaments of partners.

Be creative and be cruel, too

You'll find that teaching these drills on a grass field, or dirt (or, if you're really brave and cruel, on a wood floor or cement) will change the way people behave a great deal. Throwing drills are very different on dirt, because people will fight the throw all the way over, instead of giving up and letting themselves be thrown, as they do on soft mats.

Practice these drills in the clothes and shoes your students typically wear, and have them fight with their backpacks or other bags on. Fill bags or backpacks with soft clothing and practice throws on a crash pad.

Look for locks

Once you've taught your students the basic positions and mechanics of arm locks (and other joint locks), give them a chance to look for those locks

during free fighting rounds. To wrestle successfully, students need to develop a kinesthetic sense of their own body position and of their opponent. By this I mean they need to develop a way to feel where their attacker is in any given position. Frequent training in blindfolds will develop this important sense. But be careful your students don't try fast or dangerous whole-body moves with their eyes closed or a blindfold on! Treat blindfolded rounds more like the standing exercise of "sticky hands" or "push hands," where students must always stay in contact with each other. Generally, keep blindfolded rounds slower and safer than other rounds.

Use **arm-lock-only rounds** where no other finishing techniques are permitted. It is not so important to time these rounds, because you want students to have the time to learn to look for patterns and openings. But do remind them of the need for quick attacks and resolution.

At first, pair them with a partner who resists only passively. Feel free to stop the action and analyze a particular position like a chess problem. Gather students around a pair of wrestlers you've stopped and ask them what move they would make at a particular moment.

Have students look for other joint locks that are useful in self defense — wrist and finger locks, particularly.

Finger locks are wonderful for self defense, but hard to practice and execute because people get hurt often. But do teach your students to look for fingers to break while they're fighting. You can run slow wrestling rounds where one partner looks only for chances to

attack an opponent's fingers.

Leg locks that attack the ankle and knee can be taught, but they are of limited use in self defense. If you plan to teach ankle bars, make sure you have your students try them in shoes. Remind them that successful leg and ankle locks require incredible speed and precision, and must be drilled over and over to offer any hope of success.

Look for chokes

These drills are similar to the lock drills above. Emphasize chokes useful in self defense, not those that depend on a martial arts uniform collar or sleeve to execute. Emphasize point chokes using the thumb and fingers, and naked chokes using two hands or a hand and forearm. Practice **choke-only rounds** so students learn to look for openings, and analyze problems during stopped action as above.

To add difficulty, have your students practice chokes while blindfolded. Give them time to feel their way around their opponent's body and look for ways to choke them. This will help them get used to fighting in the dark, or to the general confusion that occurs in any fight. If they've sharpened their ability to find chokes and choking positions without using their eyes, they will be much better at finding them even when they are using their eyes. Slow moving rounds with one partner blindfolded are a good way to hone these skills.

Biting and gouging

These are often mentioned in self defense classes, but rarely taught because they are so hard to practice. They can't really be practiced in competitive drills

where both partners are fighting, because students will try them with too much force and hurt their partner.

Eye-gouging drills

But try **eye-gouging drills** where one partner resists only passively. Going very slowly, you can have one partner work with a passively resisting attacker to find positions where they can touch their opponent's (closed!) eye with their finger or thumb. Or have them touch the forehead above the orbit in a particular spot. Again, use your imagination. Have one or both partners wear swimming goggles or glasses to protect their eyes during wrestling to allow eye pokes and gouges.

Pressure point drills

Also use **pressure point drills**, and add to them by giving students common objects like car keys or pens and pencils they can use to attack pressure points. Have the students fight in everyday clothing with useful objects in their pockets they can try to get out and use against their opponent. Perhaps begin a class in everyday clothing, have students empty their pockets and say what they could use as a weapon in a fight on the ground.

Like the choking drills above, these are good drills to practice blindfolded or with eyes closed. This adds stress and difficulty and also improves the students' kinesthetic sense of their own body and that of their opponent, which is vital for finding pressure points and attacking them. They should also learn to find pressure points through clothing, rather than relying on visual landmarks on their opponent's body. Practice these drills in heavy jackets and jeans to let them learn for themselves whether a particular attack is likely to

succeed. Your students will generally remember and absorb principles they've deduced for themselves during these drills, so make sure you plan your lessons accordingly. Do give instruction in pressure points and the principles of attacking them, but also budget plenty of time for students to try and get them under difficult conditions so they learn what works and what doesn't.

Strike on the ground

Encourage your students to use their knees and elbows, particularly, to strike while wrestling. Knee strikes are particularly effective from side and upper four-corner holds. Practice strikes full force on wrestling dummies. Knee strikes are brutally effective against the head, body, or thighs, or to the tailbone while in guard.

Quick strike drills

Use **quick strike drills** to reinforce the idea of hitting and getting up. Start from static pinned positions. Have the student on top do one, two or three quick strikes and then stand up. Add to the drills by combining them with the throwing drills described above. Have one partner throw the other, pin them, do three strikes, and get up within a time limit. Put students in body armor if you wish — this will both let them hit a little bit harder but will also make them sweat more and will simulate bulky clothing.

Give particular emphasis to *striking with the head*. Practice head butts with helmets in various pins and positions. Also use wrestling dummies to practice head butts. You must be careful when practicing strikes with the head. These are not good drills to practice when

your students are oxygen-deprived or stupid with fatigue. Make head butting a technical part of your class, taught and practice when students are sharp and alert. But don't just teach head butting one time and then forget it. Come back to it again and again, or your students won't learn it since they don't get much chance to practice it during free wrestling exercises.

As a general rule, things like head butting — which students will almost never get to try full force during practice — must be taught repeatedly using special slow motion drills under controlled circumstances, or students won't develop any reflexes for using them. Other things, like arm bars and chokes, tend to be picked up faster because students can actually try them safely during their wrestling rounds. Keep this principle in mind always during your lesson and unit planning.

Kick from the ground

Kicks from the ground can be taught along with **position drills** in the defense section above. Once students have been shown the different kicks they can (and cannot!) do from the ground, have them practice the kicks while pivoting as an attacker circles. Have attackers wear shin or knee pads, and increase the complexity and ferocity of the drills as detailed above. Combine kicks with **getting up drills**, detailed below.

As always, be cruel and imaginative. Bring your students outside in everyday clothes and shoes and do these drills. They'll learn quickly that kicks are much scarier in shoes and boots, and that the ground hurts to roll around on.

Power and speed drills

Have students kick heavy bags or other targets from the ground, to learn how hard it is to generate power from that position. Place a student under a hanging heavy bag like in the sitting blocking drills above, push it away, and keep it from swinging back to its natural spot using their legs. They must kick and kick it to keep it away, and if it swings past them they have to pivot to keep their feet facing it to keep kicking it away. Make sure to remind them to start off gently and watch out for knee injuries from locking out a leg and then having the bag hit their foot.

With static heavy bags, taken off their chains and held in place by a partner, have students do speed drills. Time them for 10, 20 and 30 seconds, during which they must do as many kicks as they can. Repeat these drills with brief periods of rest until students are exhausted. Then give them more complex tasks.

Also, do **single leg drills** where students can kick only with one leg. Isolated leg training can be done particularly well with speed drills, where students kick as fast as possible with just one leg until it turns to rubber. These drills will build up kicking speed.

Throw objects from the ground

Encourage your students to practice throwing objects, even handfuls of sand or dirt, at a standing attacker. A thrown object can create an opening they need to stand up quickly and get away.

Begin simply, with **targeting drills** where students on the ground try throwing a variety of objects at an unmoving attacker. Be creative here — give your students heavy things, light things, objects of different

sizes. Position the attackers at different distances. Have students take objects out of their pockets, or their bags or backpacks, then throw them at attackers.

Increase the difficulty of the drills by having the standing partner move, evade and attack. Combine throwing objects with other drills, particularly **position drills** and **getting up drills**.

Keep weapons where you can reach them

Weapon drills

If your students use mace or pepper spray or other weapons, make sure they are forced to try getting them out in the most difficult and uncomfortable positions possible. Get mace and pepper spray cans full of pressurized water and have students carry them in their pockets or a purse or backpack. During a quick wrestling round ask them to try and get them out and use them. But remind them that in a close *melée* like wrestling those sprays will probably get all over both people, and may not be useful.

Some students may carry folding knives or other weapons. Use something safe to simulate a knife and, as above, have them try to get their hands on the weapon in a difficult or unfamiliar position. Start off easy, with a partner who doesn't resist much, but feel free to move on to tough drills where the attacker actually tries to keep them from getting the weapon out of their pocket and into use.

Weapon drills are particularly effective practice with multiple attackers, since a weapon's usefulness is multiplied in such a fight. Where there's just a single attacker, the effort to get out a weapon may not be

worth the payback. But with multiple attackers, where the fight is unbelievably unfair, a weapon's value is much higher, and students might be willing to work even harder or absorb more blows to get it out and into use.

Be imaginative in your drills. Give a defender a weapon like a knife in their bag or pocket. Have several attackers knock or pin them down. If they can get the weapon out, every attacker they touch with it must withdraw. See if students can protect themselves and escape during a time limit, then shorten the limit for the next set of drills.

Getting Up and Away

Protect your head

Weaponless drills

Have your students try to protect their heads while getting to their feet. Begin with simple **weaponless drills**. The standing attacker simply tries to touch the defender on the head with the flat of their hand while the defender stands up. As with the superiority drills described above, it is often useful to give students no instructions at first. Just let them try standing up without getting tagged on the head and see what they learn. Pair them up with different sized attackers. Then call them in as a group and ask what they tried, what worked, what didn't.

Drills with weapons and gloves

Increase the complexity by moving to **drills with**

weapons and gloves. Give the attackers protective gloves, give the defenders helmets, and repeat the drills, allowing a little more freedom in attack. Or give the attackers weapons like foam clubs or kicking paddles they can hit the defenders with. Do not let the attackers hit too hard with gloves — they will be tempted to.

Time these drills and set a limit during which the defender must stand up.

When your students have gotten pretty good at this, make it tougher. Add attackers. This should be very, very difficult for your students. If it seems too easy, stop and ask yourself why, and how to make things harder and more realistic. You're trying to teach two things: one, that students will get hit and should be ready to keep going even while receiving multiple blows from attackers, and two, that they don't want to get knocked down on the ground in a fight with more than one person.

As always, use your imagination to make the drills more and more unfair. Start the defenders in unfair positions — face down, or even upside down (i.e. standing on their head, as if they've just been knocked down that way).

You can simulate injuries, too, by having the defender put one arm through their belt, or hold something in one hand that's heavy, something they can't drop during the drill. This is a good way to simulate a broken or injured arm.

Kick to make room to get up

Teach students to take the offensive even when they're on the ground. Good students don't just kick at

attackers who step in too close — they chase them with kicks, get them to back up enough so there's room to stand up.

Use drills similar to getting up drills described above. Show students several different ways they can get up. Two ideas: First, “getting up in base,” where a defender on their side uses a sort of low scooping kick with the bottom leg to kick at the attacker, then swings that same leg back through and behind to stand up. Second: a turnover onto the knees where the student does a front kick and then a side kick as they roll onto one side, then over onto their knees and forearm for a back kick from the ground leaving them ready to run away like a sprinter in the blocks. Then run drills with a circling attacker or attackers and give defenders a time limit during which they must stand up. Shorten the time limit to increase the difficulty of the exercise. As always, feel free to improvise and start the students in unfair positions or with simulated injuries in order to disabuse them of illusions about getting up easily.

Putting It All Together

Drills are an excellent way to teach and reinforce the reflexes and skills needed in self defense from the ground. They can also be, when properly applied and structured, fun for your students. Use your imagination when writing lesson and unit plans. Combine the drills listed above to keep practice from getting stale or boring. Making drills into competitions with prizes is also a good teaching tool and keeps the drills fresh.

Don't hesitate as a teacher to make your students' lives a bit harder. Take them onto a hard floor or

outdoors once in a while to keep them from getting too cozy and comfortable on soft mats. Work the drills in the same shoes and clothes they typically wear. Don't only practice outside in the summer, either. The more realistic and uncomfortable overall that you can make your students' drill practice, the better you will have prepared them should they ever have to fight on the ground.