



The Psychology of Brazilian Jiu Jitsu

**An Evidence-Based Approach to**  
**Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu**  
**for the**  
**Total Beginner**

by

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## Summary

7 moves and 3 sequences to a strong start in Brazilian Jiu Jitsu (BJJ).

No padding or pretty pictures, just the essential information you need to improve your game.

Forget about the traditional way of learning BJJ, at least for the first 3 to 6 months.

This manual will help you build a strong foundation, a foundation that will help you enjoy your first 6 to 12 months of practicing BJJ. Rather than forgetting everything you learn and giving up as you lose motivation like 90 percent of all those who start BJJ.

Unlike other manuals and books teaching you BJJ, this manual is:

- **Simple to read;**
- **Simple to remember;**
- **Simple to implement;** and
- **EFFECTIVE.**

In addition, rather than it being based on expert opinion from a black belt with decades of experience it is written by a beginner who actually implemented the information and measured its results scientifically, using evidence-based information from scientific journal articles.

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## Introduction

Most Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu (BJJ) Academies do not have a curriculum to teach you BJJ. They follow the traditional teaching method of:

- **warm-up** including running, movement drills such as rolling and shrimping, and possibly basic partner drills;
- **technique instruction** and refinement;
- **technique practice** with a partner;
- **Q & A time** (usually occurs during technique instructions); and
- several rounds (usually 3 to 5 depending on time) of **sparring** (rolling) with different training partners.

Once you've attended several classes you will realise that techniques taught at a class feel somewhat random. It is quite possible that the instructor has a sequence in mind, such as having identified weaknesses in the team or wanting to teach a technique specific to a skill (belt) level. This is however a generous assumption, in fact, most of the time the classes and instructions will feel very random and you will soon forget the technique that was taught unless you are able to drill it several times over the weeks to come until you have fully mastered it. This is the fundamental problem with the traditional teaching method of BJJ, the disorganised and random progression to **mastery** without the use of evidence-based theories of skill acquisition. Techniques are simply not taught until the student has mastered them. Hence, most students will find it extremely difficult to progress (as is evidenced by the large dropout rate in the first three to six months) unless they are able to address this problem by implementing a strategy to overcome it. One such strategy is to develop your own curriculum or strategy to learning BJJ.

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A curriculum or strategic plan should be designed using evidence-based learning theories and practices. It will help you:

- retain information;
- practice until you have mastered the skill;
- implement the mastered skill in real life;
- provide you with a sense of achievement; and
- generalize the newly mastered skill to learn more skills.

Finally, a curriculum should be goal based. In BJJ that means it should help you improve your game and get submitted less while submitting others more often. This manual will give you the information you need to do just that - get the submission and start winning.

## **Evidence-Based Recommendation**

This manual includes specific evidence-based recommendations gathered using a systematic literature review of published peer-reviewed journal articles on Brazilian Jiu Jitsu. For the academically minded you will find this article at:

Hirschfeld, X. (2020). *A literature review into Brazilian Jiu Jitsu including learning, fitness, training, injury prevention and resulting mental health benefits.* [www.mentalityaus.com/research](http://www.mentalityaus.com/research)

## Developing your own curriculum

To progress in BJJ and start remembering techniques you will need to develop your own curriculum and practice it either during sparring sessions or with a partner during open mat.

There are countless techniques, which you can learn to master BJJ but this is exactly the problem. There are just too many techniques for a beginner. To start you will need to focus on the basics. But, the basics are **not** specific techniques as professors and coaches will have you believe but **starting positions** and **sequences** comprised of techniques.

These starting positions including sequences are:

- **standing or seated takedown** (sparring at most academies starts in the seated position. If it doesn't I suggest you ask your partner to start in the seated position with you or go to a seated position yourself as soon as the sparring starts. Unless you have gained significant skills in takedowns and break-falling, starting in the standing position will cause injuries);
- **side control and escape;**
- **submissions;**
- **breaking closed guard;**
- **passing guard;**
- **keeping closed guard;**
- **sweeping;**
- **mount and escape.**

For each of the starting positions you will focus on limited techniques so that you can actually learn them, remember them, master them, and successfully implement them. To start, study YouTube videos and pick a technique that seems to suit you most. You can always change it after trying it out and finding it doesn't seem to flow well for your body-type, flexibility, or strength. Do not judge these techniques on the basis of whether they get you a submission from your training partner, rather how well you are able to perform them and if they feel natural to you.

Bellow is a sample table but make sure you pick your own techniques.

## Sample Beginner's Curriculum

		Technique	Video Instruction
Sequence 1	Seated Takedown	1. Takedowns from the Knees	<a href="https://youtu.be/ZcBNdmh6prw">https://youtu.be/ZcBNdmh6prw</a>
	Side Control	2. Increase Pressure	<a href="https://youtu.be/b85hQ9YcaZE">https://youtu.be/b85hQ9YcaZE</a>
	Submission	<b>3. Kimura</b>	<a href="https://youtu.be/p-6lmaseoGI">https://youtu.be/p-6lmaseoGI</a>
Sequence 2	Guard Passing	4. Closed Guard Principle	<a href="https://youtu.be/w1w9lWHQ_RI">https://youtu.be/w1w9lWHQ_RI</a>
	Side Control	2. Increase Pressure	<a href="https://youtu.be/b85hQ9YcaZE">https://youtu.be/b85hQ9YcaZE</a>
	Submission	<b>3. Kimura</b>	<a href="https://youtu.be/p-6lmaseoGI">https://youtu.be/p-6lmaseoGI</a>
Sequence 3	Keeping Closed Guard	5. Closed Guard Game	<a href="https://youtu.be/otskr_OjuBU">https://youtu.be/otskr_OjuBU</a>
	Sweeping	6. Kimura Hip Bump	<a href="https://youtu.be/CCos35cv5T8">https://youtu.be/CCos35cv5T8</a>
	Mount	7. Pressure	<a href="https://youtu.be/r5JzA53twNE">https://youtu.be/r5JzA53twNE</a>
	Submission	<b>3. Kimura</b>	<a href="https://youtu.be/p-6lmaseoGI">https://youtu.be/p-6lmaseoGI</a>

### Evidence-Based Recommendation

“Rather than using trial and error for learning or simply using visual techniques as found in online instructional videos, it seems that **learning through instruction** is far more beneficial as the beginning athlete may otherwise continue to use bad technique” (Hirschfeld, 2021, p. 9).

Use YouTube videos as an indication or starting point only, therefore, and certainly do not waste your money on instructional videos sold on the internet. If you do have problems implementing a technique ask a fellow student (from purple belt up) to show you or get a private session if you can afford it. Although I would always recommend finding another student ... you can practice these sequences at OPEN MAT for example.

You will notice that there are three sequences and only seven techniques. If you can master these seven techniques within the three sequences you will have a strong base game to start from. You will also notice that there is only **one submission** (in this case the Kimura).

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## Evidence-Based Recommendation

“Focus on submission techniques first then learn techniques to get to the submission from various positions thus utilising cognitive pathways and flow (fluidity) to learn rather than learning disconnected techniques by route. This may also assist athletes learning long-term using schemas rather than being cognitively overloaded and forgetting much of what they have practiced” (Hirschfeld, 2021, p. 9).

The sequences include a starting point, obtaining position and then going for submission. **To give you this flow, learn the sequence not just individual techniques.** Once you have mastered, and only once you have truly mastered a sequence move on to the next sequence. This will take you considerable time. But, if you can master these sequences you will succeed in submitting practitioners who have been training much longer than you have. Unfortunately, you will often find yourself on the bottom. Don't worry about this too much for the time being, simply do your best after you lose control of your sequence. This is a time for you to try and implement some of the haphazard techniques you may remember from class. When the sparring ends simply restart your sequence to keep learning them through route and muscle memory. Even when your sparring partners know your techniques you will find that as you get better at them they will find them hard to defend against.

**ACTIVITY:** Using the template bellow come up with your own sequences. Or start with the sample provided and change some of the techniques, which you may not find suitable. The techniques in the sample have been chosen for their simplicity. Try not to use complex or 'tricky' moves. Stick with the basics and get strong with those.

## YOUR Beginner's Curriculum

		Technique	Video Instruction
<b>Sequence 1</b>	Seated Takedown	1.	
	Side Control	2.	
	Submission	3.	
<b>Sequence 2</b>	Guard Passing	4.	
	Side Control	2.	
	Submission	3.	
<b>Sequence 3</b>	Keeping Closed Guard	5.	
	Sweeping	6.	
	Mount	7.	
	Submission	3.	



## Scheduling your Curriculum

In order to make meaningful progress you will need to train at least three times per week. Be careful, however, not to overtrain.

### Evidence-Based Recommendation

“While BJJ is a combat sport and, hence, can lead to injuries due to joint manipulation the number one cause of injury is overtraining. It is, therefore recommended to monitor training volume and intensity carefully and to stick with a pre-planned training programme.” (Hirschfeld, 2021, p. 10).

If you’re reasonably fit you will be tempted to train as often as possible, you will however experience a nervous system overload and you will not be able to remember the sequences you are practicing. Bellow is a sample weekly curriculum including some supplementary training:

### Sample Scheduled Curriculum

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
HIIT	STRENGTH - LIGHT		HIIT	STRENGTH - HEAVY	BJJ – OPEN MAT	
BJJ – GI		BJJ – NO GI				

### Evidence-Based Recommendation

“To perform well at BJJ an athlete is advised to maximise their overall fitness. To achieve this complementary training including two (2) HIIT and two (2) strength sessions per week are recommended.” (Hirschfeld, 2021, p. 10).

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It really is up to you how you would like to schedule your curriculum. Set priorities, make sure you fit your three BJJ sessions into the week first. It would be beneficial to also do two Cardio/HIIT sessions per week and one light (i.e. Full Body 3 Sets 15 Reps) and one heavy lifting session (i.e. Full Body 5 Sets 5 Reps). But do not do these at the expense of your BJJ training or if it leads to overtraining.

## Sample Week 1 Scheduled Curriculum

You will then need to measure your performance by taking notes. This will give you feedback and keep you motivated to improve.

Week 1		Date	Competency
Session 1	Visualisation <sup>(1)</sup>		
Sequence 1	Technique 1, 2, & 3	20 Jan	Y / N
Comment <sup>(2)</sup>	<i>Need to review techniques online</i>		
Technique Taught <sup>(3)</sup>	<i>Passing the Butterfly Guard</i>		
Performance	Opponent <sup>(4)</sup>	Outcome <sup>(5)</sup>	Submission <sup>(6)</sup>
Sparring 1	<i>W3</i>	<i>L</i>	<i>RNC</i>
Sparring 2	<i>B</i>	<i>L</i>	<i>Arm bar</i>
Sparring 3	<i>B1</i>	<i>L</i>	<i>Guillotine</i>
Sparring 4	<i>W2</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>-</i>
Sparring 5	<i>P1</i>	<i>L</i>	<i>Collar Choke</i>

### Notes.

- (1) Visualisation is the watching of the YouTube techniques you identified in YOUR curriculum.
- (2) Make any comment you like about the session.
- (3) The technique that was taught by the professor/coach in the session (at least the one you remember).
- (4) The belt your first opponent had, such as: White 3 stripes, Blue, etc
- (5) The outcome is the result of the sparring. Only count the first submission. Was it a win (W), loss (L), or did you hold out the entire round (D). Do not worry about the point system, as this is not being practiced at this stage of the curriculum. Also if you win the first tap that is what you count. If the round is continued after the first tap do not count the outcome.
- (6) This is the submission your opponent used against you to win or vice versa.

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## Week 1 Scheduled Curriculum

Week #			Date	Competency
Session #				
Technique Taught				Y / N
Comment				
Technique Focus				Y / N
Comment				
Performance	Opponent	Outcome	Submission	
Sparring 1				
Sparring 2				
Sparring 3				
Sparring 4				
Sparring 5				

**ACTIVITY:** Assess if you have achieved mastery of the sequence. If NOT repeat the scheduled curriculum.

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During week two you will continue with sequence one as you are still likely to start in the seated position. This week, however, you will include the next sequence, which is implemented when you find yourself in closed guard after sequence one has failed.

You will note in week two you're only really adding one more technique (technique 4).

## Week 2 Scheduled Curriculum

Week #			Date	Competency
Session #	Visualisation			
Sequence 1	Technique 1, 2, & 3			Y / N
Comment				
Sequence 2	Technique 4, 2, & 3			Y / N
Comment				
Technique Taught				
Performance	Opponent	Outcome	Submission	
Sparring 1				
Sparring 2				
Sparring 3				
Sparring 4				
Sparring 5				

**ACTIVITY:** Assess if you have achieved mastery of the sequence. If NOT repeat the scheduled curriculum.

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And finally we move on to the last sequence. During week three you will, again, continue with sequence one and two; but now you will include the third and final sequence three which is implemented when you have regained closed guard.

You will note in week three you're learning three new techniques making this the most challenging week (techniques 5, 6, & 7).

## Week 3 Scheduled Curriculum

Week #		Date	Competency
Session #	Visualisation		
Sequence 1	Technique 1, 2, & 3		Y / N
Comment			
Sequence 2	Technique 4, 2, & 3		Y / N
Comment			
Sequence 3	Technique 5, 6, 7, & 3		Y / N
Comment			
Technique Taught			
Performance	Opponent	Outcome	Submission
Sparring 1			
Sparring 2			
Sparring 3			
Sparring 4			
Sparring 5			

**ACTIVITY:** Assess if you have achieved mastery of the sequence. If NOT repeat the scheduled curriculum.



A total of a three-week schedule is highly unlikely. Experience would indicate that most students would likely need three or more weeks to master each sequence. **Hence making this a nine-week curriculum.** In addition to the three sequences you may wish to include some defence techniques from side control, mount and half guard. At no point should these, however, interfere with your curriculum until mastery.

## Sample Defence Technique Curriculum

Defence	Side Control Escape	8. Side Control Escape	<a href="https://youtu.be/cuXq-k_9IQ">https://youtu.be/cuXq-k_9IQ</a>
	Mount Escape	9. Mount Escape	<a href="https://youtu.be/EMEuexp9zU">https://youtu.be/EMEuexp9zU</a>
	Half Guard	10. Half Guard Game	<a href="https://youtu.be/E8x1Cva8hJ8">https://youtu.be/E8x1Cva8hJ8</a>

## YOUR Defence Technique Curriculum

Defence	Side Control Escape	8.	
	Mount Escape	9.	
	Half Guard	10.	

This curriculum is not a silver bullet to defeating others at the academy. It will take you a long time to master your own techniques and you will have to go beyond what you find on YouTube to guide you. You will need to tinker and adjust each technique to different opponents and you will, most likely, continue to be the white belt rag doll to the coloured belts and those with significantly more experience to you. **What this curriculum does though is give you a strong foundation, a foundation that was built by you and suits you. It will also provide you with motivation to perfect it and, thus, continue practicing the art of BJJ.**