

WHO AM I AND WHY THAI PADS?

This e-book came about through my own investigations on how to help my training partners be their best, giving both the hitter and holder a better experience. Nothing is more frustrating than hitting with a poor holder. Then nothing feels more limiting than a holder who doesn't push you forwards. Let's be better for each other's sake.

I have done martial arts for 20 years, spending 15 years in the Inosanto umbrella of arts, with a focus on kickboxing and particularly Muay Thai, but having acquired background in kali-silat, panantukan, wing chun, savate, and various grappling arts.

Outside of some jujitsu and wrestling I've never fought in competition, and don't pretend to be an expert in either ring fighting or real close-quarters combat. I've participated in training of fighters, which is one of my favorite environments: working hard at an elevated intensity for the benefit of someone else, but generally free from injury or demands beyond what I'm able to give.

In addition to being free from damage, not having to live the fighter's grind gave me freedom to truly explore the arts. Being technical and novel, tightening up someone's defense and timing or seeing if I can score the gunting or straight blast in sparring, is where I found the maximal expression of my art.

Most of us started doing martial arts because it's cool, and you lose that if you overemphasize functionality, either for the ring or street. By this I mean only accepting or focusing on what works for you today. With this mentality, there's little to look forward to tomorrow. We live in a civilized society: even the fighting of our service men and women could be said to be of choice to some degree. Take advantage of your freedom.

Yes, you should have some core movements drilled into your body, but once you stop being mentally engaged in the reps, the benefits rapidly trail off anyway. By understanding the underlying principles, we can stretch our imagination and training to not only get more interesting reps in, but see different aspects and application of each movement. It's only by going through this process that we get to the point where, when we understand the art, "A punch is just a punch, a kick is just a kick."

Why Thai pads? I feel Thai pads allow you to train for greater power and intensity. If I had to choose one training tool it would be Thai pads since with proper holding, all but the fastest focus mitt drills can also be done with Thai pads.

Pad drills in general also allow for asymmetric training. With sufficient skill, I can train a fighter at full intensity and walk through my own workout if that's what my body needs that day. Similarly, one person can work on one attribute such as reaction and defense, while another partner works on technique and form.

This guide focuses primarily on hitting combos as opposed to high levels of holder interaction.

Download the first accompanying video to this e-book at:

<https://vimeo.com/ondemand/thaipadholding>

PAD TRAINING GOALS

The chief aim of all focus mitt and Thai pad training is to develop attributes by simulating the fighting environment. These attributes can be isolated or trained together. The general, holistic approach most closely simulates fighting and is an essential complement to sparring if you are fight training.

Keep in mind that pad training is a compromise. An ideal, Draconian way of training would be to have a partner that just absorbed your full power shots with no gear. But we can't maintain healthy partners (or relationships!) that way, so we use pads to absorb the damage.

That said, understanding what you're focusing on in any given session allows us to intelligently decide how to make those compromises for safety and still give maximum benefit to the hitter and holder.

Form & Body Mechanics

Basic drilling of movements to get the correct posture, balance, and motion instilled into the hitter. Without a lot of speed and power, pads should be held to simulate real targets as closely as possible. Proper distance recognition should be instilled at this stage.

Combinations & Transitions

Working on fluidity between motions, economy of motion for efficiency. Transitions of angles, range, entry and escape. Pad training is the best way to accommodate full-power Attack by Combination (ABC) because you can get the pad to the next hit faster than a heavy bag.

Rhythm & Timing

Timing shots based on cues or movement. This is critical to landing single direct attacks (SDA)—there's an ideal time to launch and land your strike relative to what your opponent is doing. Playing with rhythm to fake, confuse, and open holes in their defense brings your combinations to life.

Reaction Time & Speed

Can only be developed after smoothness and coordination, but is of course critical. In order to help someone to develop speed you must be able to hold fast too! Overall reaction time involves multiple stages: a. recognition of attack or opening b. technique selection c. preparation d. delivery e. recovery. Notice that only recognition and delivery can be said to fully depend upon the pure attribute of speed—the rest of your speed comes from other aspects of your training!

Power

Do as much pure power training on the heavy bag as possible. This only makes sense, as it protects the holder from unnecessary abuse. Aside from a lack of equipment, the main power training done on pads should be for a. angles not suited to the heavy bag b. power in movement/transition/combination.

Cardio & Conditioning

Impact conditioning is one of the most enjoyable workouts, and you should definitely take advantage of this to provide fun, skill-building workouts. It can be everything from anaerobic explosiveness to long-

run cardio to movement and limbering up for the less athletic. Be clear on the goal to optimize your training: don't bog down an explosive 15-second burst with correcting form—save it for after! Fighters—mouth piece in when hitting!

Co-ordination & Mental flexibility

How often do we miss an opportunity as we struggle to get our bodies in position, ready to hit, and by the time we deliver, the window has closed? Or conversely, we get an awkward hit off, but being off-balanced, it has no power or chances for follow-up?

Much of Kick of Legend is about developing these two attributes because: a. it's fun b. is the key to true mastery c. the key to flowing like water, adapting to every situation, and d. enhances the softer qualities of life (as speed and power enhance the more energetic side of it)

Range & Distance (aka footwork)

This should be a consideration in every session, but the degree of focus can vary. You can work mainly on smooth combinations with the holder making it very convenient, or the holder can vary the distance, forcing the hitter to adjust. Footwork doesn't have to change range, but is key to setting up attacks and providing defense.

Defense

Also a component of every drill. The holder needs to be checking defense, either calling errors or actively testing it with strikes of their own. **This is a prime way to become a better striker: to understand how to hold and find holes and opportunities in people's defense.**

EQUIPMENT

I've come to train with as little gear in my bag as possible. Not only because it's easier on my shoulder when lugging it around, but simplifying makes it easier to work together with more people. Not everyone can buy the gold package of gear, so they'll either be under equipped or perpetually beating up the gym equipment.

I've listed gear in descending order of importance for average training needs.

16oz Boxing Gloves

These have so many uses—partner glove drills, sparring, hitting pads and the heavy bag. Maybe not absolutely ideal for all, but good enough for all. Plus, if most of your sparring is at a hobby level, you'll never really use anything other than these or the MMA sparring glove. So you may as well get used to it.

16 oz is a pound, so unless you're going to hold heavier weights in your hands, they're good to keep on when shadow boxing, or even when just working on your kicks. It affects your body mechanics even when you're in shape!

You can even use it for some light sparring when doing kali drills.



Color:     

1 16oz boxing glove. [Click to buy.](#)

[Hand wraps](#)

These can be a hassle to put on unless you make a ritual out of it. These days I use them even if I'm not hitting hard but holding for hard hitters. Good for longevity—you may not feel it when you're young and stupid (you will if you're a real boxer and hit like a freight train) but trust me, use them whenever you're hitting hard.



2 [Buy them](#) in packs so you can wash and dry.

[Extra thick Thai pads](#)

Looking back I can't believe we used to use the common thinner Thai pads. I sometimes wonder if going home with bruised forearms every night contributed to some of my chronic wrist issues.

These can be unwieldy if you're below a certain height, and they do require some coordination to get into position quickly, but I prefer the protection and building holding skill to taking more damage.

Thai pads change the range because you brace them against your trunk, and extra thick ones that much more.

If you are holding for kids or fighters who don't hit as hard AND are exceptionally fast, you may want to opt for a lighter pad, or a medium pad that is very stiff.



3 Extra thick Thai pads. [Click for link.](#)

[Mouth guard](#)

Do you know what dental work costs these days? It's hard to ramp up to feeding full blast (which you should ramp up to in drill format) if you don't feel safe.

Even when training light, I find having one of these in allows both you and your partner to relax when doing any kind of defense drills and of course sparring.

Most gyms will have a custom mouth guard service, which I recommend not for more protection, but for comfort. It's so much easier to breathe and relax with a custom-fit mouth guard.



4 Until you get a custom one, a common boil and bite will suffice

[Groin protector](#)

Even when drilling light, accidental contact happens. Of course necessary for sparring.



5 What more to say? [Click to buy](#)

[Thin leg pads](#)

Good for controlled sparring and MMA sparring, I like these more than the heavier shin guard style because their flexibility (you can grapple reasonably with them) outweighs the extra protection of the thicker ones, especially as I'm not a huge fan of regular hard sparring.

Also good when holding and feeding somewhat live kicks.



6 All you need for most sparring and holding. [Buy here.](#)

[Focus Mitts](#)

For super-fast, dynamic hand work, it's hard to beat focus mitts. They can also be used for some kicks and can often accommodate exotic shots and angles better than Thai pads. I prefer flat medium-sized as they're more flexible. Small mitts are harder to use for anything other than punches, and curved mitts, while more comfortable, are really only good for punching with bag gloves.



7 Not my original brand, but [they get the job done](#).

[MMA sparring glove](#)

I like this particular brand because it lacks the seams that sometimes cut. Not particularly good for hitting pads, I would almost rather hit bare-handed than use them for that. These allow you to dispense with the bag gloves (which I love, but have reduced in my usage) for JKD and other training.



8 A good safe [MMA sparring glove](#).

Other gear:

Other gear people find useful include head gear (not a fan, but if your rules require it, nothing you can do), kicking shield, thigh and belly pads.

This is mainly gear that gym-based trainers need, and not for private use. You're almost certainly better off spending that money on lessons, seminars, and personal training.



9 The belly pad, a [useful training tool](#), but really is gym gear and for full-time trainers

HOW TO HOLD PADS

Now that we understand the various aims of pad drilling let's look at how to hold pads. The default hold style is optimized for general training and reasonably suits most purposes outside of freestyle rounds. At the end we'll look at variations for different training focus.

To simplify, we'll assume for now that the only equipment we're using is Thai pads. This is appropriate for partner drilling where you switch sides, as in many group classes. Also, you want to be able to train with minimal equipment.

STANCE & NEUTRAL HOLD

As much as possible start and hold in your fighting stance, whether that's a pure Muay Thai stance or slightly elongated MMA/kickboxing structure.



Figure 10 Neutral with no cue, arms & hands relaxed

Stay active—facing your hitter, moving with proper footwork. Give them the constant visual cue of an opponent ready to strike and defend.

When not holding for a strike or reacting to the hitter, keep the pads in front, arms relaxed.

We learn to keep our eyes on the upper chest in sparring—the more we can continue this in pad rounds the better. Holding close to proper range from our stance is how we accomplish this.

Hold at the target level of the hitter—within a certain range you may hold at your default ideal position, as some variation is of no consequence. However, large height differences require you to make an adjustment:

Taller hitters require you to hold above your head, which means holding more in front of you to preserve your shoulder joint. You may also need to hit into the strike a little more for the same reason. For shorter hitters I find to maintain the correct angle it's best to squat your legs down and keep your upper body vertical rather than just let the arms drop.

Remember, we DO NOT hit the pad aggressively into the strike. We show the impact position, then provide a slight impulse with the arm or hip for resistance and to protect our shoulders. The less you move, the better. However, the harder the hit, the more you'll have to move. (photos of right & wrong)

When possible, brace your muscular-skeletal structure so that the need for push back is minimal and the follow through is at a safe angle or totally absorbed.

PUNCH HOLD

Opposite side hold allows for natural resistance and best accommodates angling on the hit.

Jab

On the single or multiple jab, I'll lean slightly back and to my right with a slight counter-clockwise rotation, placing the pad right beside my face, a little forward to protect my shoulder. Now the pad relative to the hitter is more or less where my head would be. The center is a little lower than my chin (nominal target) but in exchange for holding comfort, a decent compromise as long as the height difference isn't too much.



Figure 11 Lean right to put pad near center



Figure 12 Lean back, as close to face as possible, loaded elbow joint

I'm bracing forearm against biceps, triceps against lats. The forwards impulse if any is from the hips and with a shoulder rotation. I try to not to allow impact to happen in front of my lead foot.

Low jab

I hold horizontally to my side. Not ideal, but most convenient. Brace triceps/elbow against waist/hip. Notice that it's slightly farther back than the head shot, which it should be, given that most people have their body behind their head. You can also use the single-pad straight knee hold. This changes the distance but puts the target on center, useful for certain drills, such as getting off line with the punch.



Figure 14 WRONG. Too far out. Don't swat at the punches to end up at this range either



Figure 13 Low jab. Angle toward center, as far back as safe for shoulder

Straight Right (Right Cross)

Mirror of the Jab on the right side. I'll open my body up a little, turning clockwise, often lengthening my stance to almost a boxer stance. If I must open a lot, I move the pad forward to be in line with my face.



Figure 15 Pad close to face. Slight lean to center pad



Figure 16 Surface of pad close to plane of face

I may give more hip rotation and forward hold for hard punchers to preserve my shoulder. If I must allow the punch to follow through, this is easier on the shoulder.

Low RC same horizontal hold as for low jab. Minor rotation inward on both will help preserve the rotator cuff and give a flusher hitting angle. The center pad hold is often useful to practice angling in to follow with a shovel hook.

Jab-Cross



Figure 17 Low hold against body for low straight punches & elbows

I like to hold for both on one pad to allow for more realistic, faster hitting. It also frees up my left hand for the next hold, most commonly the hook, or to test his defense. I'll make him cross hit if I want to sometimes interrupt his jab with my RH. For conditioning and pure cardio cross holding can also be beneficial.

Hooks



Figure 18 Surface of pad in center line



Figure 19 Slight lean back

Lean slightly back, hold the pad just in front of your nose, with the striking surface center line. Remember we're simulating hitting the near side of your head. We would ideally hold even farther across, but that becomes damaging to the holder's shoulder. Hit into the punch with slight hand pat or hip rotation.

Low hooks just hold in front at belly level.

Forward and diagonal hooks (not perpendicular from the side) angle pad slightly.

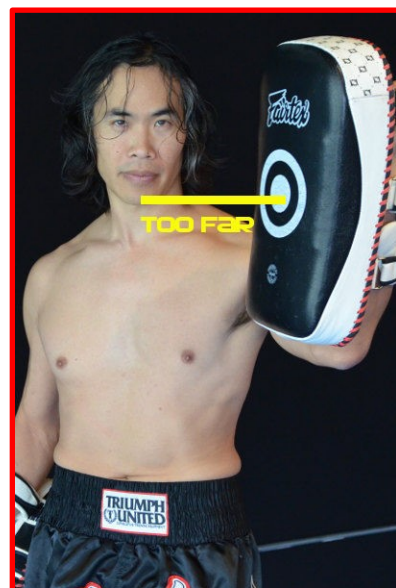


Figure 20 WRONG. Pad too far to the side



Figure 21 Low hook, surface still in center line

Uppercut & Shovel Hook

Hold horizontally or diagonally (preference and drill focus) at level of hitter's chin or solar plexus. Particularly for vertical uppercut, hit into the punch so he feels resistance, or this feels terrible to hit. This is a tricky hold because it's hard to provide resistance with the elbow up like that. You may have to provide more counter motion to provide resistance and preserve your shoulder. Key is to not change the angle as you move the pad, which can injure the hitter's wrist.



Figure 22 Change in pad angle (often by hitting into punch) can cause injury from unexpected impact angle

Forwards hitting UC to body can also be held against the lower chest. I don't recommend this hold for chin shots as it's rather awkward and the pad will hit your face a lot.

Shovel Hooks can be held two main ways:

1. Across the body, which is more accurate in height.
2. Single or doubled up against the body, which is more accurate in range

Both tend to have slightly lower impact point than reality, so either try to hold a touch higher than you feel you should, or just live with it—it cuts off the punch along the angle of delivery, so it's not so bad.

You can choose by preference, or more likely, what the next strike is.

All low punches can also be taken on the belly pad.



Figure 23 Hold high, hit down so hitter feels something



Figure 25 Diagonal UC hold



Figure 24 Shovel hook hold 1. Good to adjust height



Figure 26 Shovel hook hold 2. Good for range.

Overhand Right

Bring the elbow across the body, brace against your chest/body if possible. Lean slightly back. Like the hook, the punch is hitting the near side, but again, you must compromise for your shoulder. You can't hit into the shot at this angle, so you resist for a moment, then go with the hit if it follows through. Forward intent varies with this punch, so you must make mild adjustments to your hitter.



Figure 287 Overhand right. Brace against body for solid target



Figure 278 If you must, let the pad follow through by angling body

KICK HOLD

Basic Thai Kick

Mid line

Is coming up and inwards diagonally. You can argue about the precise angle, but I find saying 45° rapidly gets the point across. Touch the inside corners of the pads together, elbows fairly close together but not in front of your core, inside of triceps braced against the body in your own Thai stance. On impact, let it either a. push your arms back, forearms pushing into your body then springing naturally back into position, or b. push into the kick slightly, either by pushing the whole forearm, or a slight pat down hinging at the elbow. Move as little as necessary to preserve your forearms, making sure not to 'stuff' the kick.



Figure 30 Basic Thai Kick hold



Figure 29 Hold too wide, bottoms too far apart



Figure 31 Hold too horizontal

A common error is to hold the elbows too far apart. This gives a very narrow margin for error, because widening the striking surface means very low tolerance for either the leading knee or the foot. It can also create a triangle structure rather than a flat surface, leading to the same problem.

Another common error is to hold the pad at 90° or for a very vertical kick. It's true you sometimes want to hit at that angle, but it's not the default kick.

A very useful teaching technique I've found is to hold the leg of the kicker to learn to get the hips and shoulder through, foot rotated, chin down, and hands up.

Holding for power kicks, I'll sometimes circle back slightly to put the surface of the pad exactly where the body should be. Thick Thai pads change the range quite a bit. This is good for the final kick in a power series, where you don't need to get to the next hold right away. (photo)

High line

Lean back slightly or hide head behind forearms and hold pads at angle you're practicing. That can be upwards, horizontal, or downwards for the neck kick. Turn kick side slightly into kick and use arm/shoulder structure to block/absorb kick (left for his right kick and vice-versa). Careful until you figure out how the kick moves through the pads.

For power on downwards neck kick, I recommend a heavy banana bag, but can do with a careful hold as well.



Figure 322 High kick hold



Figure 33 Low outside kick



Figure 34 Kick across thighs

Low line

Bend leg and maintain maximum contact between forearm and thigh. Be careful kick doesn't drive fist into muscle. **This is not a full power hold!** This is to train combinations and accuracy only. (picture for outside, inside, and rear leg outside kick). If holding palm out for outside kick, watch for hyperextension of the arm!

I'll often not hold a pad at all, and just get them to train controlled contact on the legs. I'll also ride the kick, both to preserve my leg, and give the hitter familiarity with that energy. Riding randomly is even better

You can absorb this on the leg pad/thigh protector too, although it's also not for a full-power kick. You can also hold two pads across the front of your thighs, again not full power, but it feels dynamic.

Teep or Foot Jab (also front kick/chassé frontal & chassé Italien)

Mid line

Stack the pads on top of one another, the lower pad facing down, the upper pad facing outward. Push back with your elbows on impact and allow the kick to push you backwards if necessary. When holding for combos, be aware of how far you allow the kick to push you back. You either move the ideal next range or vary it to train the hitter to adjust.

The kick can sometimes slide down off the pad, so keep your hips slightly back.

With the belly pad, just take it on the belly pad.



Figure 33 Teep & straight knee hold



Figure 334 Teep & straight knee side



Figure 345 Front leg kicks

High line

Hold one pad like for cross or jab. Lean body/head slightly offline. Either push into the kick, or allow it to hit through, going with the force, to preserve your shoulder.

Low line

Hold pad face up on top of thigh, maximum contact with forearm on thigh, bend leg. Again, **this is target practice, not for power**, and I'll often not use the pad. I'll also escape inside, which I think of as a savate technique to get them used to missing occasion. Also escape backwards to get to next hit, either switching stance or shuffling back

Fouetté or flick/roundhouse kick

To allow for more angles, roundhouse kicks with the foot should be held with one pad. One advantage of hitting with the foot is it can slip in and strike with a variety of angles. Holding two pads effectively limits this because the hitter must preserve his foot. With one pad you can make fast micro adjustments.

For hard kicks you can reinforce with one pad behind the other, but for fast transitions, you may just hold one pad, elbow/triceps braced against the body

Be aware that the savate kick, especially with the shoe, can wrap around and hit the kidney. Turning the body or bracing slightly farther away protects against this, although I feel it should be understood when this kick is being worked on.

The same general comments on high line and low line apply, although with the low fouetté escaping is most common, and should be done often but randomly. They should be completely on balance after you escape. (photos of escape and off balance miss)

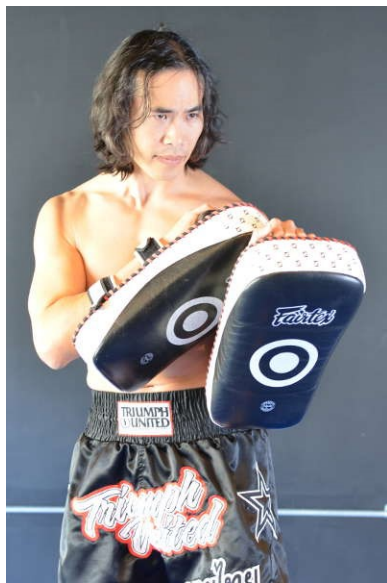


Figure 37 Same side supported for fouetté



Figure 36 Cross single hold for fouetté



Figure 35 Side kick hold

Chassé lateral or side kick/spinning side kick

I'll hold this either as for the teep, or out to the side like for a low jab/cross for lighter, target practice kicks. The kick can slide up or down, so be careful with the teep hold. It can on occasional also split the pads and drive through, so be sure to hold the pads securely together. Float back with the kick.

If I can get to the hold in time, I'll also hold a diagonal sandwich, which prevents the foot from sliding through. Push back with the elbows on impact, or this can really bite into your ribs.

It's really not fun to hold this for someone with a strong side kick. A kicking shield or belly protector helps, but the heavy bag is best for strong single-kick practice.

Spinning hook/crescent kicks or revers frontal/revers lateral/revers lateral tournant

The main issues of holding for spin kicks with Thai pads are accuracy and momentum.

First of all, most practical(!) lateral spin kicks are done high, because a mid-line spin kick often doesn't do enough damage, and runs into the mass of the body, and the low line kick doesn't do damage without the shoe. Low line I would hold as for the low fouetté.

High line spin kicks, I tend to hold the pad farther away from me and lean my head back as far back as possible. Hold horizontal or facing upwards depending on the kick. I tend to hold center of body because crossing the line is mechanically awkward.

On impact, I tend to let the pad go with the momentum of the kick. If it's a hard kick I can wait an instant, but for a weaker kick or one more just learning the movement, you have to go as soon as they touch or they'll be thrown off balance.

Low line you can hold the pad braced against the inside or outside of the thigh similar to the low Thai kick. Watch your groin on those spin kicks!



Figure 39 Spin kick hold. Make distance for safety and confidence



Figure 38 Allow spin kick through to simulate good hit

Multiple kicks

The added mass of the Thai pad means you're slower than with focus mitts, but also since the whole body is game, switching from low to high also takes longer. For pure speed and agility with snapping kicks, I recommend using focus mitts, but with Thai pads you can add power to the hitting and carry less gear.

The hold varies based on the focus and speed requirements of the drill. The fastest combo is generally X + fouetté + X. So low to high fouetté or fouetté - chassé - spinning revers. I tend to hold these single pad to get to the next hold in time. You may want to hold both pads up and switch the first pad as she hits the second.

KNEE HOLD

Straight Knee/Flying Knee

You can hold as for the teep, but I prefer to brace the pad, triceps against the body on the side he's hitting (right for his left). For power knees you can brace it with the other pad behind. You can also angle across the center line to pick up the other knee if you don't want to switch or for a diagonal angle. Most people hitting hard can't get the second knee up before you can switch if you practice the hand jive motion.

With the belly pad, can hold one Thai pad horizontal overlapping the belly pad to absorb many angles of knee. This is also how one holds for practicing the knee counter to the punch, though without a belly pad, this is not a full power hit either.



Figure 41 Single knee hold



Figure 40 Knee from clinch. A little close with thick pads

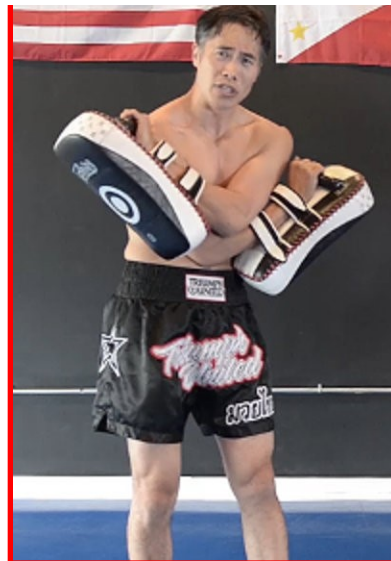


Figure 42 Curve knee hold



Figure 43 Knee from shoulder hold. Better range for knee

Clinch Knees

A common drill is to hit straight knees from the clinch. The hold is similar to the teep, allowing the knee to come in anywhere from fairly vertically to quite straight depending on focus. Practicing a realistic clinch is important but there are 2 aspects:

1. **Neck grab.**

A close neck grab and pull with each hit. Keep your neck up and strong. This conditions your neck but also protects it. This gives the hitter practice with a real grip, but the range of the knee is wrong. The pads can take up almost a third of the runway for the knee, resulting in insufficient training for driving the knee hard with the hip, which happens in that last third of the hit. This can also make us prone to patty cake the knees, just bringing the leg up, when it in fact should be among the most intense drills.

2. **Range and partner safety.**

You're not always going to find someone willing to let you abuse their neck for your training, so one way to train the knee is to ease up on the neck control. You can do this by either lengthening the grip and not pulling, or just putting your hands on their shoulders.

As the photo above shows, this has the added benefit of putting the pad surface where the body surface would actually be, teaching us how to drive the knee with the hip through the target.

Curve Knees

I prefer to do this on a heavy bag, but you can hold with the pads crossed in front of you. This is good for both the swinging curve knee and the diagonal straight.

For low curve knees you can hold the pad along the thigh, fist against it, slight bend in the arm, as much forearm contact as possible. Watch that impact doesn't drive the fist into your leg or hyperextend your arm.

People miss a lot on this drill, especially since they're finding the target by feel. Start a few slow, looking at the target until you get used to it. Even with hitting experience, holders vary in angle and height, so it's always good advice to get a few warm up shots in before turning it up.

With all these caveats you can see why I prefer to hit this on the heavy bag, or with the belly pad.

Knee Kick or Half-Shin-Half-Knee Kick

From the outside, hold this like a supported fouetté. From the inside, same hold as for the cross knee. I love the inside angle after circling out with a punch or elbow, which makes the cross hold quite natural.

The single pad also allows for extension of the leg after impact if that's what the hitter likes to do.

ELBOW HOLD

These are generally similar to punch holds:

- Horizontal is the hook
- Diagonal up is the uppercut/shovel hook
- Diagonal down is the overhand
- Straight or rising up is the jab/cross or horizontal against chest (safer than holding vertical UC unless you hold quite far from your face. I think it's better to have them crash and be close. Of course you need the relative height)



Figure 46 Straight elbow



Figure 45 Forearm shot. Look at the pad compression

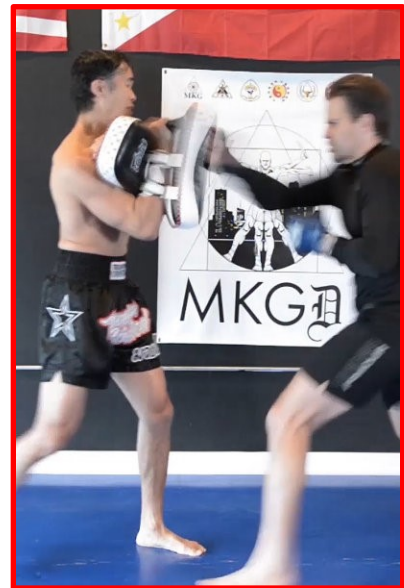


Figure 44 Straight blast

It's imperative to hold this close to get the hitter used to standing close to you. I'll often lean slightly back so they can take the distance cue off my general body position.

Some elbows can be done stepping through the shot, such as the diagonal down elbow. You'll have to mirror the footwork while providing the correct resistance by not fading too fast or taking too large a step.

EXOTIC SHOTS AND BASIC PRINCIPLES

I integrate many other strikes into my kickboxing from Filipino Martial Arts among others. From the instruction above we can summarize the basic parameters that dictate the hold:

- **Angle and target of shot**

We know we must hold as close to the target as we can at the expected angle of impact. We must allow for both the incoming and follow through geometry, as with the fouetté wrapping around the pad.

- **Speed of transition**

The expected speed and rhythm of combinations will tell us when we can hold with the same pad for successive strikes, or if we need to use both pads in sequence.

- **Power and follow through of shot**

The power tells us either when we should use 2 pads, how much push back to give to preserve our joints (also when to let the pad go with the hit), or when the hitter can't safely hit full power. This will also tell us how important proper bracing of the body structure is.

So we can now figure out how to hold for anything. Here are a few common examples:

Forearm shots

Great for preserving the hands, punches with the forearms hit like a freight train. Because the fist extends past the pad, we either have to hold farther away from us or get our head offline. Here are a few ways to hold for the forearm punch, whose energy goes slightly diagonally across the line. The energy and angle your partner hits with may lead you to try one or the other:

Forearm smash (photo holding way out in front leaning back, out to the side leaning so shot passes through outside of body)

Straight Blast

Angle body, hold for RC slightly more in front of body, left pad braced behind elbow, retreating with punches. Bounce energy forward with each impact. Also good for hard RC.

HOLDER RESPONSIBILITIES

Here are some things to keep in mind to be a good pad holder:

- Know the set drills and conventions of your gym
 - Combos and how to call them out
 - The understood numbering system (i.e. “1” for jab, etc...)
 - The understood hits for uncalled pad flash (i.e. double jab on doubled up high hold)
- Keep the drill on task
 - Don't let the hitter fall back on other techniques if it's a learning session
 - Limit conversation or rest time to minimum required
- Motivate and push the hitter
 - Don't use negative motivation
 - Find the intensity and challenge they need **THAT DAY**—every day is different
- Provide feedback
 - Scale feedback to their capacity and drill focus
 - Check range, targeting, timing, rhythm, fluidity, efficiency, efficacy
- Check defense
 - Test and look for holes in defense
 - Work on your own counter timing, **either mentally or in actuality**
- Change range and angles
 - Before and in between shots
 - Scale this with focus of drill & level of hitter

Common Errors to look for:

- Squaring up on punches or after recovery
- Not enough hip rotation
- Shoulders up unnecessarily (tense when out of range)
- Not enough standing foot rotation on kicks
- Not angling off or getting out of range after combo
- Off balance (kick standing leg)
- Too close on punches or kicks, especially in combination
- Looking down on bob & weave
- Pausing on hit
- Looking at pads

Common defense holes:

- Dropping the hands on punch
 - During shot (nipple cover)
 - On recovery
- Shoulder down on punch
 - Particularly during recovery (photo)
 - This is easier to test with a focus mitt, but verbal feedback is also good
- Opposite hand down on kick
 - Wind up in big circle to generate power—hit him!
 - Down for balance
- Chin up
- Shoulder down/chin up on kick
- Kicking side hand doesn't recover to position
- Wide set up for hooks – hit straight or push chest with pad
- Hands down on exotic shots such as back fist (particularly diagonal down)
- Opposite hand down on elbow
- Hands down shooting for double leg takedown
- Hands down on transition from:
 - Knee to kick
 - Kick to punch
 - Teep to anything
 - Clinch/tie up exit
-

SINGLE DIRECT ATTACK (SDA)

The basic single kick, punch, knee, or elbow. Even though I love training complex combinations to develop attributes and create openings, I've come to believe that for beginner fighters single direct attack (SDA) is actually under-trained. Coaches love to shout from the sidelines, "Combinations! 1-2! Punches in bunches!" ...and what happens 80% of the time? A single punch, or a telegraphed kick.

We may as well accept the reality of what the stress of a fight does to you and train for a more effective SDA. Muay Thai fighters actually do this without necessarily putting a language of theory behind it.

On the pads:

1. From out of range step to the edge of engagement range (the firing line)
2. Either:
 - a. Take an explosive step with our attack
 - b. Step in straight or on an angle & attack
 - c. Feint, step & attack
3. Angle out on retreat

The holder's responsibilities during each phase:

1. Attack if he gets too close (photo of each)
2. Cue for hit
3. Check his defense: (photo of each – show different positions of returning/striking hand)
 - a. Full beat after the hit so he's used to sinking it in
 - b. ½ beat like fast block & return
 - c. On the beat for counter hit – don't use this too much for beginners, just make them aware of the possibility
 - d. Shoot for a takedown

Jeet Kune Do theorists may argue feinting is really Progressive Indirect Attack, but if you're not drawing defense to switch the line, it's better to put it here as mastery of SDA makes mini-feints/fakes as well as footwork and angle adjustments instinctual and fully integrated into one motion or idea.

By the way, you can string several SDA's together and it looks like a combination, just without the timing or fluidity, but it will have power. **And this is the point: if we're constantly training the body for combinations but the mind is still paralyzed into one attack at a time, the explosiveness that should accompany it won't be trained in their body and their punches/kicks will feel relatively weak.**

The primary SDA tools are:

- Jab
- Right Cross
- L/R Hook
- L/R Uppercut
- Overhand Right
- L/R Round Kick
- L/R Teep/front kick
- L/R Side kick
- L/R Knee

ATTACK BY COMBINATION (abc)

There's a massive number of possibilities using only basic attacks from a left lead. Compound that with footwork, timing variations, interruptions (by counter attack) and we would have an encyclopedia that is too big to be useful rather quickly should we try to list them all.

We give the most common basics along with some neglected but rather useful ones, some intermediate combos to begin the thought process, and finally creative & fun ideas that will hopefully stimulate your own creativity. We thus hope to have an easy-to-use quick reference for you.

Further, I state long combos, but train them up in pieces, or use a piece as a stand along drill.

The key here is to unlock the thinking process whereby both hitter and holder understands how to hit & hold any combination for best body mechanics and tactical 'application' (in quotes because this is often theoretical understanding more than reality, but it's what allows us to more fully appreciate the art and play)

Remember to decide what compromises to make for range/timing/power. Prime example is RC – RK: for maximum speed/power, you must hold for RC in front of you or shuffle back very quickly.

K by convention means any kind of round kick, Thai or snap

Teep here means any kind of front kick, push or snap (chassé frontal)

UC can mean high vertical Uppercut, or shovel hook to body

BASIC COMBINATIONS

Combos that don't require a lot of stance switching or footwork to hit, but of course can be advanced as such. They also tend to alternate sides or flow fairly naturally into the next hit. Also includes the basic doubling up on the same side.

Hands Only (vary high & low and this list more than doubles!)

*** punches that particularly need to have low line integrated**

- J* – RC* / RC* – J*
- J – R UC
- RC* – LH
- J x 2, J x 3
- J – LH
- J* – OH R
- J* – RC* – LH*
- J* – RC* – LH* – R UC
- J* – RC* – LH – RC
- J* – RC* – LH x 2*
- J – RC* x 2/3
- J* – R UC – LH – RC
- J* – OH R – L UC (shovel hook too)
- LH – RH* – J – RC*
- LE – RE / RE – LE
- J – LE / RC – RE

Kicks Only

Combos ending in side kick tend to have an option to be used as a stop kick mid or low line

Kick-only combos focus a lot on angling in, hitting in transition, and out

As basic combos, are typically delivered mid-line or low-line. To hit harder, hit mid and high line.

- RK – LK / LK – RK
- RK x 2 / LK x 2
- L Teep – LK / R Teep – RK
- L Teep – RK / R Teep – LK
- RK – L Teep / LK – R Teep
- LK – L side kick / RK – R side kick
- R side kick – LK / L side kick – RK
- R side kick – RK / L side kick – LK
- LK – R spin kick to head (revers lateral or frontal)

Full Combos

- J – RK/LK
- RC – RK/LK
- J – LH – RK/LK
- J – RC – LH – RK/LK
- LK – RC – LH – RK (L 4-count)
- RK – LH – RC – LK (R 4-count)
- LK – RC – LH – LK (Odd L 4-count)
- RK – LH – RC – RK (Odd R 4-count)
- LE – R Kn – L Kn – RE (LE 4-count)
- RE – L Kn – R Kn – LE (RE 4-count)
- RC – R Kn – RK / J – L Kn - LK
- RC – R Kn – LE / J – L Kn – RE
- LK – RC – R Kn – RK
- RK – RC – LH – RK
- J – R Kn – LK – RC
- J – L Kn – RK – J

INTERMEDIATE COMBOS

Require some angling or footwork to make useful, some stance/hip resetting to chain hits together. All basic combos can be advanced the same way.

R Jab (RJ) or Left Cross (LC) usually means a stance switch happens.

We try to present useful combos as well as an example of each major body mechanics variation.

Hands Only

- J – L UC – RH* – LH*
- J* – RC* – R UC – LH*
- J – RH* x 2 – LH*
- J – RH x 2 – LC
- LH x 2 – RH – RC
- RC – L UC x 2 – RC
- RC – L UC – R UC – RH – LC
- J – R UC – L UC E (diagonal) – RE (diagonal down)
- J – RC – LH – RC – L UC – R UC – LH – RC – LH x 2 (shovel hook to high) – R UC (vertical) – RH (don't switch feet) – J x 3. **Sample speed drill**, can also 'patty cake' this

Kicks Only

- LK – Spinning R side/back kick
- LK x 2 – L side kick / RK x 2 – R side kick
- L revers frontal – R Coupe de pied bas (holder escape foot) – L fouetté
- L low side kick (chassé bas) – L revers lateral (without landing from last kick, hop in) – RK
- Jumping RK (i.e. off LL raise against leg kick) – L fouetté – R low side kick (chassé bas)
- L teep/front kick – R teep or jumping front kick
- Teep – Flying Knee

Full Combos

- J – RH – LK
- RK – Superman punch (RC off RK fake) – LK (leg)
- RK – Superman punch (RC of RK fake) – LC – RH – LK
- J – LE – RE – R Kn off neck grab – L OH – R UC – LK (leg) – RC
- J – R Kn – RK (leg)
- LK (leg) – spinning RE
- LK – R Kn – RE / RK – L Kn – LE
- RK – R Kn – RC / LK – L Kn – LC
- RK – RH – LH x 2 – RC (or RE)
- LK – LH – RC – R Kn – RC
- RK – L Teep – R Flying Knee – RE / LK – R Teep – L Flying Knee – RE
- J – R UC – L UC – LH – R Kn (diagonal) – RK
- LK – R UC – LH – RH – L Kn (diagonal) – LK
- L Kn (diagonal) – RC – R Kn (straight) – RC – LE – R Kn (diagonal)
- J while step together for LK groin – RC – R Kn – R slap w/ side step – L Cuban UC (JKD)

ADVANCED COMBOS

Jump spinning kicks, less used strikes, strikes from 'weak' positions, as well as strikes from other arts such as back fist and straight blast. These are not all difficult from a physical perspective, just put here as 'extra information.' Some are here only because they're physically difficult, such as 2 jump kicks in a row.

The full combos are intentionally awkward and require figuring out. Some have application, some are just to make you think. This investigation I hope stimulates the habit of analysis. **You may find altering a combo makes it work better for you, especially switching sides, such as finishing with a RE rather than a LE. Do it! That's how you make the art your own.**

Play with footwork to make these work. Take chunks of the longer combos to isolate ideas.

Hands Only

- J – LH – R chopping straight Elbow (SE) – LE
- J – L Up E (vertical) – R chopping SE x 2
- J – L BF – RC – straight blast (start w/L)
- J – L UC BF – LH – RH – J
- RC – R BF – LC – RJ
- J x 2 – L UC BF – R diagonal hammer fist – L UC – LH – R diagonal down BF

Kicks Only

- Revers lateral – fouetté – side kick (same leg, don't drop if possible. Vary order of kicks)
- RK (fouetté bas or Thai kick) – R front kick (without landing from last kick) – fake LK – cross step to spinning RK (revers lateral/back kick/side kick)
- LK – R jump spinning revers (frontal or lateral)
- RK – jump spinning L side kick (chassé) – jumping R fouetté
- R coup de pied bas – R fouetté – L revers lateral – L side kick (chassé)

Full Combos

- J – L BF – RH* – L Kn (diagonal) – RE – (push w/LH) – RK
- RK – R vertical hammer fist – R BF – J – RH (ear slap into optional neck grab) – L curve Kn – R diagonal Kn
- J – L UC BF – R UC – L BF – RH – RE – R Kn – RK – L Teep
- J – R chassé Italien (stomp kick) – LK – RK
- J – R straight lead (Bruce Lee punch) – R BF – LK – LC
- L side kick – R OH – L UC (groin slap) – R/L/R battle punches – diagonal up RE – R Kn
- J – L straight lead – RE body – R vertical BF – L OH – R Kn – L revers
- R inverted groin kick (JKD) – RC (or R slap) while stepping forwards w/RF – L Kn (also try 1st kick w/J same time)
- J – L UC BF – RC – R UC BF – LH – LE – RE – R hammer fist (angle '1') – jumping L Kn
- Jumping L revers – LK – jump spinning R revers – RK
- R Teep – RK – RC – 4 battle punches starting L – jumping LE
- L side kick (low) – LC – RH – R UC – LE – L vertical BF – RC – spinning R revers
- LK (low) – R chassé Italien – L side kick – RC – LH – RK – L chassé Italien

THAI PAD CONDITIONING

I believe you should be able to hit most of these combos for conditioning, and in fact doing so will reveal why they're challenging—the micro-adjustments, constant footwork and shifting often slow you down before your heavy guns wear out.

Once your group reaches the requisite skill level, I suggest rotating more advanced combos into your conditioning on a regular basis.

Still, there are plenty of reasons to strip down conditioning on Thai pads, and we'll present some ideas here.

First 2 overriding questions:

1. Why are you using Thai Pads?
 - a. To provide realistic, quick-response drilling?
 - b. Because they best accommodate the strikes and angles?
 - c. Because it's the most convenient?

The real reason is often c – it's best for a large class format and it develops team work, community, and pad holding. It's also the most versatile single tool when heavy hitting is always on the table.

This is fine, but contrast this to one-on-one or fighter training where you should just use the best tool for the job. For example, if you're training pure power you may stand behind the heavy bag, or use a focus mitt/Thai pad in combination with it.

Either way, it should inform how to hold and what to focus on.

2. What are you developing with the workout?

This should inform your workout length (class limitations aside), the way you coach, and the drills you use.

Power should only be done after thorough warm up, and in short bursts with long rest periods, similar to power lifting.

Speed has 2 modes: with and without power. With power it's like an 80% shot, with the priority to move on to the next motion. Without it can be like a game of hyper-tag, and also can be broken down into **a.** full motion (which requires great discipline and coaching) and **b.** shortened for minimal delivery time—you'll often see this in come almost patty-cake like boxing drills. With focus mitts or Thai pads, you'll often have to hold them in front of you, close together to accommodate the speed.

This is trained in short to medium bursts, often with active rest (i.e. defense or conditioning) to maintain that heightened sense of urgency. It can also be trained with relaxed rest if you want to focus purely on the physiological response, transitioning from rest to full flight.

Blitz is maximum speed & power, but over a 3-8 second duration—enough for a combo and escape footwork. This is the self-defense/combat rhythm.

Agility drills require dynamic movement, either footwork, escape or transition between hits, bob & weave, sprawl, or all in a hot mess together. This should destroy their calves and those muscles that assist in micro adjustments for balance.

Heart – one way to build the heart and mental toughness up is to throw in attacks either during the drills or in between rounds (or make it the whole round!), when the hitter is physically tired and not quite in a fighting/sparring mentality. The rules of these rounds typically make it extremely lopsided for the holder, something the hitter has to work through.

Anaerobic capacity is close to the overall situation of a sport fight. Bursts of high-intensity hitting over the course of a round, with total or active rest between. Most athletic Thai pad rounds default to this, and there is a huge range of intensity and variety here.

Aerobic capacity lowers the intensity, lengthens the round, and takes away rest. This is good for training long combos and the 'just get a sweat in' that many people are seeking. Most casual Thai pad rounds default to this.

Gyms will often throw alternate exercises between rounds—push-ups, jump lunges, sit-ups, and my favourite, the sprawl, which is great for MMA training. But what is often overlooked is how they fit in with the overall training goals.

Calisthenics are great for an overall workout, just as calling out sprawls or having sprawl rounds are great for the overall MMA game, but are not necessarily of use in developing the attributes in focus, so use with proper intent. You have no business doing 20 pushups between rounds on power punching day!

Conditioning Drills

Most of these can be modified to suit the focus at hand with just changes in intensity, reps, or sets, although some are better for power or speed etc... Also may be used for warm up.

Remember to add the simpler combos listed above!

- 1-x, x-1 of y tool(s) for z sets. i.e. 1-5/5-1 kicks each side for 10 sets; or 1-10 punches, knees, and kicks each side.
- J x 10 – RC x 10 – LH x 10 – R UC x 10 (any tool or combo per set i.e. (LH – RH) x 10)
- Straight blast
- Hand flick J – RC for speed (timed)
- (J – RC) x 5 – sprawl – RK x 2 – sprawl – LK x 2 – sprawl – RK x 2 – LK x 2 – sprawl
- 1 – 2 – Kn – sprawl
- K while receiving cut kick – K
- Skip knees from clinch
- Getting thrown around in clinch
- Holder holds one leg and moves around for hopping balance. Also can punch pad during.
- Holder holds one leg and hitter pivots leg/standing foot from straight to turned over constantly
- J – R OH – circle out/post RA against takedown – LH – RC
- Marching punches/elbows (step forwards with RF & LC etc...)
- Marching slips/bobs
- Constant bob & weave for time or reps
- Marching leg escapes (backwards)
- Teep – flying Knee or any jumping combos
- Kn – push with hand/forearm (against Thai pads to be aggressive) – K
- Jumping down elbow – push – K
- Side lunge – side kick/chassé (same side that lunged)
- Back lunge into Kn/Flying Kn/Kick
- Squat – push hitter back to set stance – RC/LC or Kn/K/E
- Spin kick x 3 (same side walking down mat)
- Multiple kicks without putting leg down – fast or slow i.e. fouetté x 5 or revers – fouetté – chassé
- K – shield – K/punch
- Hit body with Thai pad, often during ab workout, such as crunches or leg raises.

END NOTES

Get out there, get to work. Remember, I present a lot of variety and fancy stuff; but ***it should only be 5-10% of your training***. Find what works for you and make that the fun stuff or ‘dessert’. Even in my own training I spend way more time with fitness and the basics that then *allows* me to play with the other stuff.

The idea that there is only one way to do things is fading fast, but that can mean the roadmap is blurry. In exchange for this freedom you’re now, with your teachers, responsible for sorting it out. For most of you, even fighters, it’s okay to be ‘wrong’—it’s just martial arts. Have fun, train smart, develop your own brain for analysis, be kind to each other.

Thanks to all my teachers through the years and training partners. I credit them often in my materials, but as always: Ian Chow, Bob Carver, Ajarn Suchart, Chris Malgeri, Kurt Cornwell; their teachers and friends: Dan Inosanto, Rick Faye, David & Linda Hatch, Ajarn Chai, Erik Paulson, Francis Fong, Bill McGrath, Salem Assli; and seniors, training partners old & new: Joey de los Reyes, Archie Luz, Ben Lagman, Josh Bitterman, Victor G., Mike Sheppard, Joe Aleman, Tyler Adair, Peter Miles, Peter Dyga, Lea Bond, Danielle Z., Lord Byron, Mark Kousmerik, Ron T., Jay Dallo, Nick C., and all.