



CANADIAN JIUJITSU COUNCIL

Honour Respect Quality Cooperation Integrity

Training Resistance and Counter Techniques:

Understanding the Right Approach at Every Level

In the journey of Jiu Jitsu, knowing when to resist and when to cooperate during training is crucial for maximizing learning and skill development. Proper understanding of these dynamics helps practitioners, from novice to Black Belt, progress efficiently and safely.

Resistance in Training: When and Why

At the novice level, training drills are typically performed without partner resistance. The goal at this stage is clear: to develop fundamental movement patterns, technical accuracy, and confidence. Resistance introduced too early can hinder the learning process by interrupting the practitioner's ability to understand and internalize correct technique.

Consider a basic hip throw drill taught to new students. If the partner being thrown resists by stiffening their posture or pulling away, it prevents the person drilling the technique from feeling the natural flow of balance disruption and body movement. The thrower may then resort to improper mechanics or strength-based compensations, undermining the purpose of the exercise.



Instructors design beginner drills to be cooperative for a reason. When a novice partner resists prematurely, it creates frustration, bad habits, and confusion about proper technique application. At this stage, success comes from repetition, timing, and form — not from "winning" a drill.

Moreover, introducing resistance when it has not been requested by the instructor can be a form of arrogance or ego. It suggests a prioritization of personal pride over mutual learning and respect. Such behaviour ultimately hinders not only your own progress but also that of your training partners. For example, during a simple wrist grab escape drill, an overeager student resisting with excessive grip strength may cause their partner to feel ineffective, leading to discouragement or injury.

Additionally, when an instructor is demonstrating a technique, there should be no resistance unless specifically requested. The demonstration is a teaching moment, not a training moment. Resistance

during a demonstration disrupts the instructor's ability to clearly convey the technique's principles and flow, and it compromises the learning opportunity for all students observing. If, for instance, an instructor is illustrating a shoulder throw and the uke (the demonstrating partner) suddenly pulls back or stiffens, it not only hampers the clarity of the demonstration but can also confuse newer students about the intended mechanics.

As practitioners advance to higher ranks, controlled resistance becomes a valuable teaching tool. At advanced levels and Black Belt training, resistance is gradually introduced to simulate more realistic application scenarios. For instance, during advanced randori (free practice), a partner may offer subtle resistance to test the practitioner's ability to adjust entries, maintain kuzushi (off-balancing), and transition between techniques.

Partner resistance helps sharpen timing, adaptability, and problem-solving under pressure, all essential qualities for effective self-defence and sparring. However, even at these levels, resistance must be purposeful, safe, and appropriate to the training goals of the drill. Unchecked or chaotic resistance during a technical drill can devolve into unproductive struggle, detracting from the skill refinement process.

Counter Techniques: An Advanced Layer of Learning

For nearly every technique in Jiu Jitsu, there exists a counter. However, learning and applying counters correctly is a highly advanced process that demands subtlety, timing, and deep understanding.

It is important to recognize that a counter's success often depends on intercepting an attack early in its progression. For example, trying to counter a hip throw after you've already been taken off balance and are flat on your back is too late. Effective counters rely on early recognition of the initial movement, allowing the defender to redirect or neutralize the technique before it fully develops.



Imagine a basic wrist lock being applied. An experienced practitioner may feel the initial setup and subtly rotate their wrist or reposition their feet to neutralize the attack before the lock is fully engaged. Waiting too long or attempting to overpower the technique once it is fully secured will usually fail.

Good counters are not born from brute strength but from awareness and feel. They capitalize on the energy and direction of the attacker's motion, using it to the defender's advantage. A classic example is countering a single-leg take-down attempt with a sprawl: the defender feels the forward drive and immediately drops their hips back and down, using gravity and leverage rather than muscle to nullify the attack.

This requires not only technical knowledge but a heightened sensitivity to your partner's balance, timing, and intent. Learning counters should be approached methodically and with patience. A proper counter drill starts with a clean and cooperative execution of the original technique, ensuring

that the student understands the mechanics of the attack fully before introducing the complexities of countering it.

Attempting to rush the learning of counters without proper foundation often leads to sloppy, unsafe movements and ineffective technique. It is far better to first perfect the mechanics of both offence and defence before moving into the artful world of counter-techniques.



Final thoughts

Respecting the appropriate use of resistance in training and understanding the sophisticated nature of counters are vital for every Jiu Jitsu practitioner. By cooperating fully at the novice stage and gradually integrating resistance and counter techniques at advanced stages, we build a stronger foundation for technical excellence, adaptability, and true martial arts mastery.

Training must always match the purpose of the exercise: beginner drills require cooperation, advanced drills require thoughtful resistance, and demonstrations require complete compliance. Practicing with humility, patience, and an open mind not only accelerates your own learning but strengthens the growth of the entire training community. Through thoughtful training and disciplined progression, we honour the spirit of Canadian Jiu Jitsu and support each other's growth on and off the mat.

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