

**WILL IT BE EASY?
NO!
WILL IT BE WORTH IT?
DEFINITELY!!!**



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Foreword

Congratulations on taking the first step to joining a martial arts club and embarking on an amazing journey that will hopefully last for the rest of your life.

It is said that 1 in 10,000 students who start in martial arts reaches black belt level. Obviously the fickleness of human nature is partly to blame for this. People starting and quickly realising it doesn't meet their expectations is another factor. There are other issues such as work and family commitments as well as things like relocation.

I personally believe that a major factor is the initial choice of club and instructor/s. If people are training in a positive, constructive atmosphere and feel appreciated. If the syllabus is progressive giving students a feeling of accomplishment. If classmates all get along well. If the instructor/s are sincere, supporting and encouraging then the student is far more likely to carry on with their training.

I have been involved in martial arts as a student and instructor for over 25 years and have seen many people leave martial arts who perhaps would still have been training if they had initially selected a more appropriate club for their needs.

I have written this eBook with the intention of giving you the information required to enable you to make a more informed decision when selecting a martial arts club.

Choosing a style that suits you

Before you choose a style or a club first spend some time considering what you want to get out of martial arts. Do you want a black belt? Do you want to get fit? Do you want to train for social reasons? Do you want to lose weight? Do you want to become an instructor? Do you want to compete? Do you want to learn self defence for work reasons (police officer, prison officer, door supervisor) or simply to feel more secure? Perhaps another reason or more likely a combination of some of the above. When choosing a martial arts style be sure to keep your reason/s for training in mind.

Be realistic about your age but don't write yourself off too soon when considering a style. Check out my blog article ["Are you too old for martial arts"](#). Obviously health issues can write certain styles off. If in doubt discuss with your doctor. Fitness levels can be a deterrent to starting martial arts but very often martial arts will significantly improve your fitness and conditioning. I have a student who lost 3 stones through training. He told me that he hates physical exercise but has forced himself to do it because he loves martial arts so much and wants to perform better.

Some will prefer a stand up kicking and striking art such as Taekwondo, Karate etc. Others may opt for a predominantly ground based grappling style such as Brazilian Jiu Jitsu. Judo offers takedowns and also incorporates groundwork. Aikido uses joint locks and throws. Hapkido offers joint locks, throws, kicks, hand strikes and ground work. You will know by instinct what type of style you feel comfortable performing. For example if being hit in the face is your worst nightmare then kickboxing might not be a good choice for you. Having said that it may possibly be your best choice by far. You see martial arts is about challenging yourself and growing through adversity so doing something that scares you can often be a very positive step. Be realistic though and if you do decide to "face your fears and do it anyway" discuss your fears with the instructor before you join the club.

If you're not sure which style to opt for visit or call clubs from various styles that you are considering and have a chat to the instructor. Tell them what you want to get from training in martial arts along with any concerns that you may have and get their opinions. A good instructor will be more than happy to help you.



Choosing a club that suits you

Firstly check the experience and qualifications of the instructor. If you feel uncomfortable asking the instructor outright check them out on the club website, it will often give a bio of the instructor/s in the club.

Having said this I have come across very experienced instructors who have lost their early enthusiasm and are simply going through the motions. In contrast I have met relatively new instructors bursting with enthusiasm determined to bring out the best in their students.

No two clubs are the same even if they teach the same style. For example one karate club may practice the same discipline as another but levels of allowed contact can vary wildly. One may use full contact and another may only allow light contact. This is great because it opens martial arts up to a much wider range of students allowing people to select their preferred level. Whichever you opt for be sure to respect the level of contact defined for that club, you can become very unpopular throwing full force punches in a semi or light contact club.

Traditional martial arts etiquette is observed in a lot of martial arts schools. For example instructors must be addressed as Sir, permission must be obtained before leaving the mats for any reason, you must bow when entering the training hall etc. These clubs place great emphasis on character development. Respect, discipline, courtesy and tolerance are some of the traits that will be developed in a traditional environment. In my opinion this is by far the best option for all children and most adults. Other clubs will have a more relaxed attitude where no formalities are required. These may typically be clubs that teach reality based self defence systems (RBSD). They will often wear street clothes to be more realistic and are not usually concerned with traditional martial arts etiquette. If your major objective is to learn to defend yourself in the shortest possible time and you're not interested in traditional martial arts then this type of class may be ideal for you.

Ask yourself whether you feel at ease with the instructor/s and students, if you decide to join you will be spending a lot of time with them. Do the students appear to get on well together? Are they enjoying their training? Do the senior grades have a good relationship with the newer members or do they behave in a detached superior manner? Basically does the set up feel friendly and welcoming?

Is the class well organised, for example do all the students know what is expected of them? Do they have a sense of purpose or does chaos rule?

Choosing a club for a child

It can be difficult to decide on a club for a child. The type of class which is most suitable to their needs will vary according to their age and maturity. In the past I have had 5 year old students who were perfect students and 8 year olds who were very immature. From this it can be seen that the suitability of classes can't be determined just by age it depends on the individual. To generalise though very young children thrive on a wide range of lively activities for short periods of time. Children in the 8 to 11 group still like the lively short activities but their attention span is increasing and they are getting more interested in the technical aspects. Children aged 11 to 15 need to be challenged technically and physically. At this age they have developed an interest in the finer details of the art and have many questions.

Whatever the age range a sense of progression is essential in any class. Very often the grading process can be frustrating for both parents, students and instructors.

There are children who work very hard and have excellent attendance records but find it difficult to absorb the lessons. Other children don't take things as seriously are very sporadic attenders but have a natural ability and pick things up quickly. For these reasons I have heard of clubs who don't grade students any more. However without gradings students would have no tangible means of gauging their progress. There is also a great sense of achievement from successfully completing a grading. For these reasons I think they are a necessary part of martial arts

Obviously children's classes should be dynamic, fun and entertaining otherwise the child will soon get bored and want to quit. This doesn't mean however that the class should be run like a play school. The martial arts syllabus should be taught effectively and the basic character traits should always be emphasised.

Children in martial arts classes are often taught that there is a difference between having fun and being funny. Learning martial arts should be enjoyable but there should be a sense of order and discipline in the class. When choosing a club ask if it is alright for you to watch a class and judge for yourself.



State of the art venue or quality of teaching?

The ideal training situation would be a state of the art venue with top quality instructors teaching a well thought out and researched syllabus. Unfortunately some of the clubs that have state of the art venues by necessity have profit as a number one priority and are run on more business like lines.

With the running costs of a club like this class times may be cut to a bare minimum so more classes can be fitted into the day. I know of clubs that have 30 minute lessons with no gap between sessions. This leaves no time for a change over period. By the time the bowing in period and warm up are done there isn't much time left for the syllabus. On top of this explaining and demonstrating new techniques will take up even more time leaving even less for practice.

Often larger clubs will insist that all uniforms and equipment are bought through the club. This does give a great club appearance and ensures that decent equipment is used but again can be very expensive.

Contrast this with the smaller club where the instructor is passionate about martial arts but the focus is on training and not running a business. The quality of instruction is not affected by the venue, neither is the syllabus or the amount of attention you will receive during lessons.

When choosing between a club first use the criteria given in "Choosing a club that suits you" or "Choosing a club for your child". If both clubs fit the bill then opt for the one that suits your budget. If however the state of the art club doesn't offer quality instruction and a well thought out and researched syllabus the choice is obvious.

Does the club teach a widely available style?

Niche minority martial arts can be great but what if you fall out with the instructor or class numbers aren't enough to sustain the club and it closes, you may have several years of qualifications but nowhere in your area that does a similar style. It could result in you starting from scratch in another style.

This is an important consideration as a niche style may offer exactly what you want from martial arts. If it does then it's worth checking the club out and finding out things like how long it has been running? Does it have a healthy mix of grades? For instance if all the students are low grades and the club has been running for 10 years then it should ring alarm bells. A good mix of beginner, intermediate and advanced grades shows a healthy progression and retention rate within the club.

If you opt for a widely taught style such as Taekwondo, Judo or Karate then if the club closes or you decide that it's no longer for you then you will have more options to continue in your chosen style. This is by no means guaranteed or simple though. For example there are so many styles and variations of styles that it's quite possible you may not be able find one where you can continue where you left off. In this case the instructor may insist that you start at white belt and work your way back up.

Whether it's a niche or main stream art time spent checking the club out before you join will be time well spent.



Beware the easy guaranteed Black belt

Achieving black belt is the ultimate measure of achievement for some people in martial arts.

In some clubs it can be achieved in 18 months. I have heard of styles where it can take up to 12 years. The average in my experience is 2 nights a week for a period of 5 years.

I recently read an article on a martial arts instructor's site that recommended dumbing down techniques so people wouldn't be put off by the difficulties involved in learning the style. In other words make



Would you like fries with your belt sir?

everything easier to retain more students and increase the amount of profitable grading's. I also heard of a club that held a grading and 2 of the students didn't turn up on the day. The following lesson the instructor handed them their belts and certificates without testing them at all.

The value of traditional martial arts is to progressively challenge people. If they find something difficult hopefully they'll persevere and eventually succeed. The next time they meet a challenge they do so with a little more confidence. By continually repeating this process and making the challenges increasingly more difficult the student becomes capable of things they would never have dreamed they could achieve when they started out. The major benefits of martial arts are gained by overcoming difficulties and adversities over a sustained period of time not by avoiding them.

I find it sad that a black belt which is universally recognised as a symbol of determination, perseverance, dedication and an ability to overcome adversity should be reduced to a commodity that can be bought provided the price is right.

8 THINGS YOU MUST KNOW WHEN CHOOSING A MARTIAL ARTS CLUB

For more on this topic check out my blog article ["Good timber does not grow with ease"](#)

When visiting a club to assess whether it's right for you ask the instructor what the minimum time is to achieve a black belt. Also ask how many lessons a week you will need to attend and if there are any other criteria involved.

For example in one of my clubs gradings were held every 3 months, you were eligible to grade if you knew your section of the syllabus well enough and you had completed 20 lessons. It works out at 2 lessons a week with a small amount of leeway for absences. If you had completed 18 lessons and then didn't attend for over 4 weeks for any reason you had to start the 20 lessons again. This can obviously impact greatly on the time it takes to achieve black belt.

If your aim is to have a black belt with minimal effort and inconvenience then obviously the clubs that offer the easy option will give you that. If you want a black belt that you truly believe you have earned and that you will be proud of for the rest of your life then select a club where you will have to really work for it.

The Cheapest option isn't necessarily the best

A common misconception with martial arts is that if an instructor makes money they have "sold out".

The general idea seems to be that martial arts instructors are so dedicated to their art that they should do it for the love of it. Medical staff, police officers, hospital workers, ambulance drivers and teachers all perform admirable services to the public and no one doubts their sincerity or dedication because they get paid for their work. Like every other person earning a living martial arts instructors also have to pay bills and put food on their family's tables.

Teaching martial arts professionally is considerably more time consuming than most people realise. It's not just a case of turning up for classes and teaching. The club needs to be promoted, websites kept up to date, blogs written, Facebook and Twitter articles need publishing, fliers need to be designed ordered and circulated. Class plans have to be made, registers kept, the syllabus developed, grading's organised, uniforms and equipment supplied to students, insurance needs to be arranged and paid, accounts have to be kept and submitted not to mention the monthly or weekly fee collection.

If someone is working full time in another profession and only has a few hours spare in the evenings to teach it is going to be difficult to deliver a good service over a prolonged period of time. Many will become disillusioned and stop teaching, others may quit because of financial difficulties. If a professional service is to be given then realistic fees must be charged. It serves no one if the fees are so low that the club can't continue.

Although martial arts instructors like any other professionals have the right to earn a decent living be very careful of hidden fees and contracts. I'm sure we've all seen the adverts:

First 2 Lessons FREE !!!! FREE Uniform !!!!
Spaces limited. Don't miss out Call Us Now!!!!

Looks great so what's the catch?

The first two lessons are often held with just an instructor and last for about twenty minutes, this obviously gives no idea of what a typical class will be like. The new student is taught to address the instructor as Sir and bow. They are then perhaps taught a very basic kick or punch. Throughout the session they are constantly praised and told what a fantastic job they are doing. The parents are pleased that their child is being taught the discipline and respect associated with martial arts and their child is very excited because they feel they've done so well. The parents are then told of the many benefits of martial arts training and how fantastic the club is.

While the excitement level is high the parents are told that the club fees are £30.00 a week but paid annually at a cost of £1500 per annum in advance. However the club is offering a scheme for today only. If they sign on the dotted line here and now they will only pay £1200.

8 THINGS YOU MUST KNOW WHEN CHOOSING A MARTIAL ARTS CLUB

If this is a binding contract and you have paid the £1200 up front then after the statutory “get out clause period” your money is gone. If you or your child decide you don’t want to train any more after a month you have made an expensive mistake. The club may offer a convenient monthly payment scheme but if the contract is binding then the end result is the same, the payments must be paid till the end of the contract even if you or your child stops training.

The two free lessons and free uniform no longer seem such a good deal.

Also beware the bolt on fees. If your child would like to spar then an extra £200 must be paid or very expensive sparring equipment must be bought through the club. If your child would like to join the “Black belt club” then extra fees are involved. Some clubs raise prices as student’s progress through the ranks. Other clubs charge annual membership fees.

In short check out all costs involved and whether there are any binding contracts before you sign up. If there is a binding contract check if it can be terminated and if it can are there any financial penalties? Also check if it is possible to freeze the membership in case of illness/accidents or unexpected work commitments etc. Although some offers are time sensitive and places may be limited be aware that this is often purely a pressure tactic and try to keep some sort of perspective before you sign on the dotted line.

What to look for in an instructor.

I am a great believer in positive reinforcement but only if it is used appropriately. I have come across instructors who start or end most of their sentences with “Awesome”. If your technique is wrong it is still “Awesome”. Please don’t hear what I am not saying here. It’s very important to encourage students and build their confidence but praise that is not merited can only lead the student to believe that anything will do. No matter how little effort they put in they are still “Awesome”. Students should also be taught basic techniques and principles first. For more on this have a look at my blog article [“When training there is one natural order, Basics first”](#). Unfortunately some instructors are more concerned with impressing and entertaining their students with flashy techniques resulting in students who can perform jumping spinning kicks before they know all the details of a basic front kick.

Alternatively there is the sincere, passionate instructor. It’s easy to spot them, their focus is on their students and not on how they appear to observers. They are studying their students with a view to helping them progress and improve. They’re not concerned with the latest jargon and buzzword, they don’t feel the need to impress. I personally have had a lot more satisfaction from a Korean Grand Master silently nodding at my technique than I ever have from any superfluous insincere comment.

It is the instructors responsibility to ensure that the training environment is safe and none threatening. Classes should be strictly monitored for signs of bullying and excessive force. In a good instructors class everyone knows how they should behave and trains accordingly.

I recently heard a story from a friend whose nephew was a student at a club that held a very effective marketing campaign. The student’s parents were concerned about their son being bullied by an older and more experienced opponent when sparring. By rights the opponent should have shown their son consideration and helped him out but instead he used excessive force and made the experience so unpleasant for the boy that he eventually dived to the ground to escape the battering. The boy was reluctant to attend any more lessons so the parent discussed the matter with the owner and was assured that it wouldn’t happen again. The next lesson he was bullied again in exactly the same way by the same student. As a result the student left the club. The uncle told me he got the impression that the club weren’t bothered about losing a student as they had such a good recruitment plan that they could easily replace him.

If you or your child are starting out in martial arts seek out the passionate and caring instructors over the commercial and trendy ones. These are the instructors that care more about you and helping you to progress in martial arts than the money they can take from you.

Again ask to visit the club and if possible watch a lesson. During the lesson watch how the students interact with the instructor/s. Ideally the instructor/s will be in control but friendly, students should be respectful towards them but not intimidated. Also chat to other parents at the end or beginning of the class if possible. I don’t mean give them the third degree but just ask questions like how long their child has been training there and if they enjoy it. This will give a much clearer indication of the quality and professionalism of the instructor/s than a telephone call would.

I sincerely hope that you have enjoyed reading this eBook and that the information will be useful to you. I wish you good luck, happiness and success in your martial arts future.

About Dave Marriott and YAKMA

I have been training in martial arts for over 25 years and my association is the [Yorkshire Academy of Korean Martial Arts \(YAKMA\)](#). Why not check out my [blog site](#).

At [YAKMA](#) you can be sure of:

Quality traditional martial arts training in a friendly, fun environment with:

No contracts

No annual fees

No progression fees

No upselling

No hidden costs

Testimonials

Read what some of our parents and students think of YAKMA

Jules Clarke and Dr Keren Bielby-Clarke

My wife and I agreed that our children (boy and a girl) would benefit from martial arts training early in their life (5+ yrs old). Both of us had undertaken some training in our childhood (Judo/Karate/Jiu Jitsu) and we wanted to ensure that whomever we chose to teach our children instilled structure and discipline whilst fostering confidence within them.

Friends recommended David Marriott (Yakma Hap Ki Do) and our children embarked on their Hapkido journey. It was a martial art we were not initially familiar with, but by observing early sessions and with some internet research we concluded that it offered a very practical and balanced skillset (punches, kicks, holds, and groundwork). We quickly realised that David was not only a skilled practitioner - he could clearly articulate the techniques, inspiring the children to master them and driving them to achieve their gradings.

This was 8 ½ years ago for our son, and 7 years ago for our daughter. Both look forward with genuine enthusiasm to their weekly sessions, both have achieved adult blue belt grades and we have no doubt that both will continue to learn and achieve higher standards within the discipline. Our initial hopes have been fulfilled, and it's lovely to observe the mixed skill ranges and ages of the groups and how supportive they are of each other - all of this under David's guidance.

Our also children do other, more team-based activities and gain great experience from these, but Hapkido is a fantastic activity to teach the value of the self and more importantly the development of individual confidence to achieve goals within a friendly and supportive environment.

Based on our experience we have absolutely no hesitation in recommending David Marriott (Yakma Hap Ki Do school) to you.

Testimonials (cont)

Debbie Hill

"Hap Ki Do is an incredible skill and discipline to learn which nurtures positivity and respect and builds on physical and mental strength. Over the four years that my Daughter has been part of Yakma, having joined at the age of eight, she has received excellent coaching and support and has developed an inner confidence which feeds through into other areas of her life. I would highly recommend Yakma Hap Ki Do to anyone who is looking for a positive outlet for themselves, or their children, to enjoy a group activity, improve their fitness and make good friendships."

Chris Dexter

"My children have trained at YAKMA since they were 5 and 6, and in this have benefited from the regular training, they are also learning that to achieve in life they have work hard and show determination and persistence. Thanks to Dave's teaching and patience they have learned that through hard work and determination they can achieve great things. I started training at YAKMA when I was 35. Since then I have pushed myself further than I ever thought I could. Classes are fun and great exercise, since joining Dave's classes I've managed to lose 3 stone and feel much fitter!"

Claire Atkinson

I wanted my son to sign up for Hapkido lessons to improve his confidence and make him more assertive. It was the best thing we ever did. Lucas loves the lessons and has genuinely never wanted to skip a class. Whilst his confidence has grown, thanks to Dave, its become much more than that. He has become focused and determined. He works hard, practices and all without being asked because its enjoyable. He also feels part of something. The sessions are amazing value, and when you see your child perform at a grading session and witness the pride shining out of their smiles, you realise the effect Hapkido has is priceless!"

John Cadman

William joined YAKMA on his 5th birthday. He is now 12 and has enjoyed every minute of his 7 years training. Dave Marriott is one of the best and most patient instructors I know, taking time to help individuals to perfect their technique and enabling them to progress through their gradings. Hap Ki Do has not only helped William maintain an extremely high level of physical fitness, which has helped him in other sporting activities, it has also given him greater mental strength, patience and respect in all other areas of his life.

For more information on YAKMA and our classes contact Dave:

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