

Consumer Education Message

Getting Ready to Pick a Martial Art School

by Dr. Joe Schaefer

In 20 years of teaching I have found that martial art training is one of the most transformative pursuits for adults and kids; for Men and Women. In the right environment, weak characters are made strong, integrity and honor are cherished and people of all ability and backgrounds rise to their highest potential. This happens in martial art schools teaching every type of style or system. It can occur under a 1st degree black belt teacher as surely as it can under a 10th degree black belt. This consumer guide will **not** tell you which style is best or what schools to avoid. In general, you need to just trust your instinct when talking with the instructor and keep your radar going as you look around their school and talk with their students. If you feel that the school's main purpose is to get your signature on a contract as soon as possible, you should start worrying.



Don't Worry! There are still lots of great schools and teachers out there!

Whether or not you ever choose to become a student of my martial art school, I feel compelled to give you the valuable information in this **Consumer Guide**. In the search to find the perfect school, I'm afraid you might fall prey to an ugly scam, walk away from martial arts in general and miss out on a potentially life changing experience. **As a parent and a consumer, I never want to get into a situation where I feel duped or tricked, and I love martial arts so much that I especially don't want you get on the wrong side of a bad experience.** If you were me, and you knew that a large percentage of all full-time schools operated **like used-car dealerships**, wouldn't you want to shout out to the world, **BE CAREFUL!**? These schools exist primarily for the purpose of separating people from their money. I always believed martial arts were supposed to be different than that. **I bet you thought so too. The good news is that with the right information you will easily be able spot these schools a mile away.** Then can you get on to the task of picking a great school (of which there are many) and reaching your personal best.

The biggest misconception about picking a martial art school is that you can price shop over the phone...or at all.

There's nothing wrong with price shopping but it only works if schools actually quote you the **real price**. Most people enroll in martial arts with the goal of reaching black belt or its equivalent in that style (whether they realize it or not). The problem with price shopping is that most modern, full-time schools will not let you reach those levels for the prices they quote you in the beginning. In fact, they will usually have several more costly programs with longer term contracts that you will be **forced** into before you can actually get what you came for, a black belt. These programs might have value, but you should be told up front that the starting price will not get you to your goal (not even close in most cases). **It's time to insist on ONE PRICE, ONE PROGRAM, and ALL THE MATERIAL YOU NEED!**

The 6 questions you MUST ask before even taking an introductory lesson.

Here are 6 questions that will make you into the most powerful martial art school shopper in existence (a black belt in shopping). Any school owner with nothing to hide will answer these questions without hesitation. Many times martial art school owners rely upon your discomfort and lack of information about martial arts in general to keep you from asking these questions. Read through them. Keep in mind that before you spend large sums of money with any school, **you deserve answers to every one of these questions.**

1- What are the actual rates?

If they do not answer this over the phone, it is the first indication that they have an enrollment scheme. This alone is not too bad, but it does tell you that price is a big issue with them. **Will I get to black belt for this price?** How can you compare one school to the next without knowing what the quoted price will get you? Don't be fooled by the price they quote you on the phone. Directly ask if you will **“ever have to pay more per month, or join a special club with higher rates or a longer contract to reach black belt (or whatever your goal may be)?”**

2- What are the registration fees for joining?

A modest fee at the beginning is not too bad a sign, but a huge fee (more than \$100) should tell you that they don't expect people to stay for very long and are getting everything they can right up front.

3- Are there any special clubs requiring new contracts, special prices, or registrations fees? (Black belt clubs, master's clubs, etc)

Teachers know that a beginner student probably doesn't have well-defined goals at first and so will think that the lowest level program will be enough. They also know that within a few months you will grow bored with simple punching and kicking and want to move to a higher level program. They will say “How about the black belt club? Well yes, it does cost more, but it's worth it”. **Ten years ago there were no “Black Belt Clubs”. Every student was automatically on their way to that goal, and it didn't cost extra.**

4- How many tests will you have to pay for to reach belt black belt?

Test fees are a part of most school fee structures. Unfortunately, there is no end to the number of belts and tests a teacher can come up with. Find out right up front how often you or your child will test and how much each one will cost. There is no right number here, but you shouldn't be paying big fees for your child to get a piece of tape on their belt every other week.

5- Are tournaments required or encouraged?

Tournaments can be a great experience for a martial art student. However, many parents or adults are very set against competition. If your school **requires** tournament participation, instead of making it voluntary, you need to know it up front. The entire feeling of a tournament school is different. All training will be focused on what is required to win a competition. While this is good for some people, it is poison to others.

The Deal Breaker

6- Can I get a 30 day trial and a money back guarantee if I am not happy with the class?

This one will raise a few eyebrows in the martial arts world. IT SHOULDN'T. Do they believe in their school, or not? You are paying premium prices for a committed length of time with a person you only just met. I happen to think that the school owner should accept some or most of this risk if they believe in their school and the value it will bring to your life. In my school, every student gets a full 30 day trial period before any further commitment is required, and I will refund their money and buy back their uniform if they are unhappy with the instruction or experience during that month. **I figure that this is what any responsible business person should and usually does. Why should martial arts be different?**

Now you are armed with questions that make you the most powerful shopper in the martial art world. At the bare minimum, every shopper deserves to know what they'll get for their hard-earned money. This has been my intention in writing this guide; to share my inside knowledge of this industry so you can find the very best martial art experience for you and your family. Only a visit and test run in a school can tell you whether the style and teacher are right for you. That decision must be answered by your own intuition; so ask probing questions and trust your feelings.

Master Joe Schaefer, PhD.

Owner, Shaolin-Do Kung Fu & Tai Chi

www.austinkungfu.com