

# Martial Arts Training Tips



**By Master Brian Johns**

© 2021 Brian Johns

All Rights Reserved

Compiled in Canada

First Release February 2021

## Warning

This book is presented only as a collection of training tips, in written and video form. The author does not make any representation, warranty or guarantee that the techniques described or illustrated in this book will be safe or effective in any self-defense situation or otherwise. You may be injured if you apply or train the techniques illustrated in this book. To minimize the risk of training injury, nothing described or illustrated in this book should be undertaken without personal, expert instruction. In addition, it is essential that you consult a physician regarding whether or not to attempt anything described in this book. Consult the relevant self defense laws in your jurisdiction with respect to the appropriate use of force and duties associated with self defense situations.

Contacting Brian Johns

Website: [www.bamboospiritmartialarts.com](http://www.bamboospiritmartialarts.com)

Email: [masterbrian@bamboospiritmartialarts.com](mailto:masterbrian@bamboospiritmartialarts.com)

# Acknowledgments

I must acknowledge the following as this book would not be possible.

1. **GM Remy Presas** - Without him, there would be no Modern Arnis in my life.
2. **Dan McConnell** - for introducing me to the art of Modern Arnis.
3. **Master of Tapi Tapi Chuck Gauss** - for being my teacher and showing me the ins and outs of tapi tapi.
4. **Master of Tapi Tapi Ken Smith** - for being a great teacher and for his friendship.
5. **Master of Tapi Tapi Gaby Roloff** - for her friendship, advice, and for being a great teacher.
6. **Shihan Janet Lawless** - I first met S. Janet in 2008 and our friendship has thrived since then.
7. **To my students** who have appeared in multiple YouTube videos over the years. Thank you to Terence Dayot, Alex Andrade, my wife Mary-Anne, Dref DeMoura, and

Lastly, thank you to my worldwide brothers and sisters in Modern Arnis for your part in my journey!

# Table of Contents

By Master Brian Johns	1
Acknowledgments	3
Table of Contents	4
Personal History	5
Chapter 1 -Changing Partners	6
Chapter 2 - Taking Private Lessons	9
Chapter 3 - How to View Private Lesson Videos	13
Chapter 4 - How to Supercharge Private Lessons	16
Chapter 5 - How to Translate Stick to Empty Hand	19
Chapter 6 -Six Ways to Practice Your Cane Anyos	21

# Personal History

My martial arts journey began when I was 18 years old

# Chapter 1 - Changing Partners



**O**ften I'll tell my students, "Change partners!" during class. Why? Because it's good for all of us. In this chapter, I list seven benefits of changing and working with different partners.

Modern Arnis and many martial arts rely heavily on partner based drills. There are several reasons why working with the same partner over and over is not beneficial.

**Working with the same partner is detrimental in that being in a predictable comfort zone does not allow you to stretch your horizons and consider the different possibilities.**

The more partners you work with, the more prepared you will be if that moment ever comes.

Here are the reasons why changing and working with different partners is beneficial for you:

**(1) Broaden your knowledge base:** You get familiar with a broader range of movement of timing, speed, and rhythm. Different people move differently. Not all have the same speed, strength, or timing. The more partners you work with, the deeper your knowledge base becomes.

(2) **Antidote to “going through the motions:”** Changing partners is an excellent antidote to “going through the motions” with a familiar partner. I have seen partners who are too familiar with each other, and they start to socialize instead of focusing on the technique. The result is that they are going through the motions, and this is not beneficial to either partner. To me, that’s worse than doing nothing.

(3) **Different sizes:** by sticking with the same training partner, they deny themselves the opportunity to train with different people.

There is a whole range of possible partners who differ in height, weight, reach, and strength. If you’re training with a 5’6” partner all the time, how are you going to handle a person who is 6’4”? If you don’t avail yourself of the opportunity of working with different partners, then you will not know how to adjust various techniques for different sized partners.

(4) **Puzzles:** Some partners may unintentionally present puzzles to you that you have to figure out. Training partners who are stiff and muscle their way through techniques is a good example. Often they are not aware that they are not relaxed. While an instructor or a senior partner may point this out to them, it is sometimes beneficial to figure out how to deal with this issue.

How do you find the path of least resistance when encountering this type of energy? This is an excellent opportunity to figure out how to work with this energy, find openings, and use it against them. If you work with the same partner, you get used to their compliance or their strength. This is not exactly beneficial.

(5) **Different variations of the same technique:** Even though they are practicing the same techniques, you may be seeing slightly different versions of it. You may end up saying to yourself, “Hmmm, I like this variation; let’s experiment with this.”

**You may learn different things from different partners. Sometimes they trigger an inspiration in you. “Oh, I just thought of something!” Don’t deny yourself this opportunity.**

(6) **Experienced partner:** Working with an experienced partner may present different challenges than working with a beginner. The experienced partner may show you changes in the timing or speed of a technique that might throw you off. Thus, this is an opportunity to learn the deeper nuances of a technique you thought you knew. Or the experienced player may correct you on one or several aspects of a technique. Take advantage of the other person’s experience.

(7) **Beginner student:** Working with a beginner presents a different set of opportunities. First and foremost is the opportunity to teach. This is where you begin to acquire teaching skills, through trial and error or with instructor guidance. When you teach the beginner, you are also teaching yourself. I can tell you from experience that I have learned much more from teaching than from being a student. Much more than that, the beginner student will get to know you and like you!

By insisting that the students change and work with different people also benefit from improving relationships in the class as the students get to know each other. It also helps expand their knowledge base and understanding of the concepts and techniques of the martial art they are studying. By seeing the different attributes that different folks bring to the table, they can also see what they need to improve.



# Chapter 2 - Taking Private Lessons



**F**or many students, group classes are the optimal option for a variety of reasons. The reasons range from socializing, the opportunity to train with different partners, a chance to decompress from work, forget about distractions, and get-togethers after class.

However, some students cannot attend regular classes due to shift work or irregular work schedules. Some others may not be comfortable in a group setting. Some others desire one on one training to increase their skill level. Still, others seek out private lessons to build up confidence for group classes.

I have taught one on one private lessons to several clients for several years now. It has been tremendously enjoyable for myself and those clients. For many of them, I focus on the stick and teach the 20 Bamboo Spirit Flow Drills and their variations, the left vs. right tapi tapi, and two vs. one stick drills. Footwork, body mechanics, proper leverage, timing, rhythm, angles of attack, and other concepts are taught within the flow drills.

**That said, I tailor the private lessons according to the students' needs or those who request to work on specific material.**

From a Filipino Martial Arts perspective, one on one training is the optimal way to learn and is a lot of fun. Some studies indicate that one on one instruction is more beneficial than group classes.

I believe that FMAs is most effectively taught one on one.

## **Here are 7 killer reasons to take private lessons:**

**(1) Schedule flexibility:** you are not able to attend the group classes due to work, family, or a horrible commute. Private lessons offer flexibility in learning a martial art without attending a group class.



*Click on the image to play the video.*

**(2) Comfort Zone:** you prefer not to be in a group setting. Let's face it, some people are introverted, and that's okay. Private lessons are a great way to meet your training needs. On the other hand, you just might prefer one on one training.

**(3) Expert Instruction:** What better than to learn from one who possesses an in-depth knowledge of martial art?

**The instructor will often tailor the speed, timing, and techniques to your level.**

The instructor will typically start with "walking speed" and incrementally increase the speed and complexity of techniques as they gain more confidence and competence.

**(4) The Flow:** There is nothing like learning the flow while training in flow drills. All aspects of a drill, including but not limited to footwork, timing, speed, rhythm, and reaction timing, will be taught and adjusted. The flow is an integral part of Filipino martial arts, emphasizing finding the path of least resistance rather than "muscling" through a technique. To learn the flow, hands-on training with an experienced instructor helps tremendously.



*Click on the image to play the video.*

**(5) Instant feedback:** The teacher will spot areas that need to be practiced or worked on, thus leading to the increased technical proficiency and greater competence by the student. No more wondering if you're on the right track!

**(6) Rapid Progression:** Perhaps you'd like to accelerate your training in conjunction with the group classes. I have noticed a considerable improvement in those who have trained with me privately versus those who have not. As a student improves, the bar is set higher by the instructor. The training becomes progressively more challenging, leading to even more improvement. Stagnation won't happen here!

**(7) Tailored Lessons:** Either the student can request to work on specific material, or the instructor will adjust the material for the student's need or skill level. Sometimes, classes can get a bit too "cookie-cutter" and can hinder a student's progress. For example, a technique may be more useful for a student with a particular build than for others. In this case, sometimes, the instructor does not have time to make adjustments for every single student. This is one of the best benefits of private lessons, *making the art more personal for the student.*



# Chapter 3 - How to View Private Lesson Videos

If you have the instructor's permission, videos of private lessons can be a tremendous aid to your martial development. Below, I discuss how to watch private lesson videos based on my experiences.

**Those of us who practice martial arts have different preferences regarding retaining material from a private lesson.**

Some prefer to take copious notes, complete with diagrams and drawings. I have seen some who take incredible notes and have gone through multiple journals. Others prefer to jot down the significant points of a session afterward.

Some, like myself, like to have sessions recorded on video if at all possible. I'm not much of a note-taker and am even worse at drawing. Perhaps due to my severe hearing loss, I have always considered myself to be a visual learner. Hence, video is right up my alley!

**First things first, always ask the instructor for permission to record the private lesson.**

Some may agree, and others may not.

If an instructor does not consent to the session being recorded, there is an easy workaround. Grab two friends post-session and have one record you doing techniques that you learned during the private lesson. The only caveat is that you may not remember the techniques correctly. However, I've done this many times, and it has been quite helpful.

**That said, I recommend that you do the following:**

**(1) Obtain the instructor's permission.** He or she may agree. They may stipulate that you may not show the videos to anyone. Keep your word.

**(2) Be sure that the camera has sufficient battery power.**

**(3) Set it up on a tripod or stable surface.** In the alternative, have a friend or a bystander video the session.

**(4) If it's possible, take a break here and there to check on the camera.**

After the private lesson, you have several options.

You can elect to watch the entire raw video and rewind as appropriate.

My personal preference is to edit the video on iMovie on my Macbook and break it up into 2 to 3-minute clips focusing on particular techniques. I usually dispose of clips containing familiar techniques and prefer to study those with variations of techniques that I had not seen or considered before.

I prefer to edit out the sound so that I can focus on the technique in its entirety. Furthermore, I like to edit the clip in slow motion speed to enhance the learning experience, at least for me. Lastly, I want to store the clips in iTunes for easy access, and from there, I can upload them to my iPhone to watch at any time. Lastly, if they are GOLD to you, make sure that you back them up. I prefer to back them up on an external hard drive.



*Screenshot of a private lesson video*

## **What do I look for in these kinds of videos?**

Note: most of the video clips that I have saved are usually on Modern Arnis and particularly tapi tapi.

**Yes, there is an element of technique collection, but I usually look at how they fit in the big picture. Beyond that, I typically look for the following:**

**(1) Observe your body positioning vs. your instructor's** – Am I standing in front of my instructor? Did he manipulate into a disadvantageous position? How? The video may give you clues.

**(2) Compare your own structure with the instructor's** – are you crossing the center line? How is your stance at any given time? How about the instructor? Compare your structure to his, and you might glean new insights.

**(3) Watch your instructor's techniques:** Go beyond learning new techniques. See how the instructor utilizes footwork, timing, rhythm, and his check hand.

**Watch for the *pre-technique* setup, the *technique*, and the *post-technique* finishing move.**

**(4) Watch your own techniques:** Frequently, an instructor will ask you to practice a technique you just learned. Compare your execution vs. his/her execution. How are your structure, execution, and timing? Are you using your check hand?

If you view a video of yourself in a private lesson, focus on a technique or two, and practice with a friend or a training partner.

A one-hour private lesson can potentially provide you with substantial material to practice for quite a while. I still view myself and Master Chuck's clips to see if I can glean anything that I've missed in past viewings. Try it!

# Chapter 4 - How to Supercharge Private Lessons

**Once you start getting into private lessons, how do you maximize them?**

In this chapter, I discuss how to supercharge your private lessons. If you have the opportunity to pursue a private class or series of ongoing private lessons, it probably would be a good idea to prepare for the class in advance.

When you go on a road trip to an unfamiliar location, it would be prudent to map out the route to know how to get there. You wouldn't get into a car without directions and just drive aimlessly hoping to find the destination.

You should apply the same philosophy when approaching a private lesson.

**Ideally, you and the instructor should have a plan for the private lesson.**

Usually, I will determine what the student needs to work on. On the other hand, they may have some questions. Or it can be a combination of both. A private lesson where the instructor and the student are groping in the dark can lead to disaster and, at best, an aimless waste of time. As the student, it would behoove you to be prepared and to know how to get the most out of a private lesson.

Here are some ways to supercharge your private lesson:

**(1) Prepare with questions:** Either a mental list of questions or, better yet, with a notebook with questions. Be detailed with your questions, as that will tighten the focus for the lesson. If the instructor asks your focus, it is not helpful to say "anything/everything." Remember, it's better to have a map than not to have a plan.

**(2) Take notes afterward:** During the lesson, jot down quick notes that can jog your memory after the session ends. Immediately after the lesson, open your notebook and write down your notes, especially with new material, a fresh take on pre-existing material, or tweaks in your technique.



**(3) Video the private lesson:** Ask the instructor for permission. If utilized correctly, this can be a tremendous tool for self-analysis. The potential for improvement exponentially increases if you know how to use video editing software to break the video into slow motion segments.

**I have had numerous privates with Master Chuck Gauss over the years, and I often have videoed our sessions with his permission to cut them up into slow motion segments to study. This is tremendous in your development as a martial artist.**

**(4) Ask for a review at the end:** It's wise to ask the instructor in the last few minutes of a private lesson to review the material that was covered. A review is tremendously useful not only for the student but also for the instructor. The instructor will be able to remember when he taught and set the stage for the next session.

**(5) Go with the Flow:** while you may come prepared with questions, be ready for the instructor to take the lesson on a different tangent. For example, I may have watched you in class and determined we need to work on specific material. I may say, "Hey, I've noticed something that you've been doing, and I want to work on it."



*Click on the image to play the video*

**(6) Practice the new material:** What's the point of a private lesson if you don't practice what you have learned? Either visualize the new material regularly or find a training partner to practice the material. This will serve to solidify the lessons learned in the session with the instructor.

**In summary, if you have the opportunity to partake in a private lesson with an instructor, prepare for it and have a plan. Trust me, you'll get much more out of it with a plan than with no plan.**

# Chapter 5 - How to Translate Stick to Empty Hand



*Click on the image to play the video*

**A** question that is most frequently asked is whether FMA stick techniques translate to empty hand self-defense techniques.

Of course, they do! After all, we really can't carry bolos or sticks out in public. :-)

Fortunately, we can translate stick techniques/movements into realistic empty hand self-defense techniques.

The challenge is "how to translate the stick to empty hands?"

The above video gives some guidance on this topic.

In the video, I explained that there are three stages to this analytical approach.

1. Practice the stick movement;
2. Analyze the stick movement;
3. Replicate the stick movement with the empty hand equivalent.

This is fairly obvious, right? Getting a handle on this process takes time. The more experienced you are, the easier it gets. If you are a newbie, it may be a bit more challenging and require an experienced instructor to show you how.

**Digression: I started my martial arts journey in a kung fu style as an 18-year-old. The training sessions were heavy on conditioning and traditional Chinese kung fu forms. During my time in this style, we hardly delved into the forms or any self-defense training applications.**

One day, I asked a senior student about the applications of the forms. His sincere response was, “*You’ll know what to do when the time comes. The applications will just come out of nowhere.*” I shit you not. Unless I massively misunderstood him, he was saying that the applications will just magically appear.

As Master Ken of “Enter the Dojo” would say: “*That’s total bullshit.*”

Anyway, I have this experience in mind when explaining how to translate the stick movement. I try to make it as common sense as possible. I emphasize that it takes practice and that there is no magical approach to this.

Let’s go back to the video. I used single sinawali as an example.

1. I practiced the single sinawali.
2. At the 1:17 mark, I broke down single sinawali into its component parts. Essentially, I broke it into a cross-body motion and a downward motion.
3. I then replicated this with the empty hand equivalent.
4. Next, I took the cross-body motion of single sinawali and transformed it into a parry. Wing Chun folks would recognize this as a “*Pak Sao.*”

I applied the above process to palis-palis and a punyo technique in the remainder of the video.

Hopefully, this will give you some tools to figure out the empty hand equivalent of a stick technique.

If you struggle with this, seek out the guidance of an instructor.

# Chapter 6 -Six Ways to Practice Your Cane Anyos

**In this chapter, I'll discuss six ways that you can practice your cane anyos. Or is it just six?**

Martial arts schools vary widely in the number of required forms ranging from fewer than 5 to 30. Invariably, there are different philosophies in these schools concerning the practice of kata/forms. Some schools advocate that a large variety of kata is needed to practice as many moves as possible. Others lean in the direction of a lesser number of kata, emphasizing practicing the same movements repeatedly.

I tend to lean toward the "less is more" crowd and really don't see the point of learning so many forms.

**Modern Arnis has four (4) cane anyos and eight (8) empty hand anyos.**

In this chapter, I'll focus on the four cane forms. As a result of research, trial and error, I have come up with six ways that you can practice the four Modern Arnis cane anyos.

- (1) Single cane;
- (2) Double cane;
- (3) Espada y Daga;
- (4) Knife;
- (5) Double knife;
- (6) Empty-handed.

As one can see from the above list, the cane anyos are incredibly adaptable and versatile. You need not necessarily be bound by a "prescribed" way of doing the cane anyos. I think that it's fair to say that Professor was not dogmatic and wanted his beloved art to be adaptable and to be able to flow in any given circumstance. I remember him telling us at a Michigan camp how important the anyos were to him and that it was an essential part of Modern Arnis.

Some might say, "what's the point of practicing the anyos in different ways?" A simplistic answer might be, "well, if you get bored, you can practice the anyos in different ways." I think



that the better answer is, "if you practice the cane anyos in different ways, you'll really get to intimately know the movements of the anyos and make it part of your subconscious." Practice them until the movements become natural and done without thinking.

## And how about practicing the above cane anyos *left-handed*?



*Click on the image to play the video.*

Then you've just doubled the number of ways that you can practice the cane anyos!

I practice my cane anyos left-handed regularly and highly recommend that Modern Arnis players do so.

If you're going to do left-hand tapi tapi, you might as well do left-hand cane anyos.

Again, "what's *the point*?" Professor Presas advocated training both sides. I strongly believe that training both sides of the body is hugely beneficial. Otherwise, there is a training imbalance that I believe is unhealthy.

## **Tips on training your non-dominant hand:**

1. First, perform the Anyo with your dominant hand.
2. Then, attempt the cane anyo with your non-dominant hand.
3. If you get tripped up on a particular move, go back to your dominant hand and slowly practice that move. **FOCUS ON THAT MOVE.** Say to yourself "*what is the mirror image of this?*" Switch back to your non-dominant hand and work through that portion of the anyo.

4. Work your way to the end of the anyo.
5. Check that it is the mirror image of the dominant hand version of the anyo.
6. Finally, do lots of reps!

**Caveat:** Don't get caught up in the number of ways that you can practice a kata. "*I can do this form in 3,000 different ways.*"

Really? Is that necessary?

No.

Just pick a few variations that you like and stick with them, and do them repeatedly.