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Special Report

THE 9 QUESTIONS YOU *MUST KNOW* BEFORE CHOOSING ANY MARTIAL ARTS SCHOOL

Thanks for your interest in joining martial arts. **You've just taken the first step towards a lifetime of mental and physical health, confidence, security, success and happiness.**

Choosing a martial arts school is a very important decision that will hopefully affect your life for years to come. A good school will give you many benefits to help make you happier, healthier, and safer. A bad school could leave you with a horrible experience, *and charge you an arm and a leg for it.*

Unfortunately, most people are at a disadvantage when picking a school. The average person doesn't know the difference between a *sabumnim* and a *sifu*, any more than the ITF and the WTF. (*Sabumnim* is a Korean word for a type of instructor, and *sifu* is the same in Chinese. The ITF and WTF are two main styles of Taekwondo.) This guide will give you **9 essential things you must understand** about any martial arts school before deciding if you want to study there.

This guide was put together by the Korean Academy of Taekwondo. While we're one of Colorado's oldest and most successful martial arts schools, there are other programs that also offer good quality and value. The bottom line is that we want you to have a **successful training experience, even if it's not with us.**

In the past, our school has taken over several other failing schools and adopted the students into our program. *We've seen so many students burned through shady practices,*

if this guide helps even one person, it will be worth it. The tragedy is that those things could have been avoided, if they had just had the information in this guide. Through this and through talking to the many transfer students we've received, we've discovered several key features of schools that will give you a positive training experience. We've distilled that into [9 essential questions](#) you must consider before selecting the right martial arts school.

First, here is a list of **red flags**. There is no government regulation of martial arts schools. **Absolutely anyone (with no training or experience) can open up their own martial arts business. Here are some things to be aware of.**

List of Red Flags:



No Trial Program – A school that is confident in the quality of the program will let you try a few classes (or weeks) before asking you to commit to any length of classes. Beware of anywhere that wants you to sign up without sampling what the classes are like.



Closed Classes – Beware of any school that doesn't allow parents or prospective students to drop in unannounced at any time. Good schools **want parents and friends to see the positive work that they are doing**. Not allowing people to watch could mean that they're not teaching well, or it could even be a sign something worse is going on.



No Access – In addition to watching classes, a good school would **want you** to talk to their students, parents, and instructors. (Outside of class, of course). Any school that forbids this probably has several really unhappy people.



No/Limited Website – While a web presence doesn't prove that a school is good, websites are a must for any serious business in this day and age. If the owner has neglected this important detail, what else has he/she neglected?



Qualifications – If the owner of “Bob Smith’s Karate” has a 10th degree black belt in “Bob Smith Do” then that should be a red flag. Perhaps he has other qualifications, perhaps not. Some instructors will go so far as to purchase academic degrees from non-accredited sham colleges based on ‘life experience.’ A quick Google Search should tell you if the college is legitimate.



Black Belt Club, Leadership Team, etc. – Many schools will sign you up for a basic rate, and then try to ‘upgrade’ you to higher tuition. The **basic rate usually includes only the beginner’s classes**, so you are either forced to pay much more or stay a beginner forever. One local school charges \$159 per month for two beginner’s classes per week. However, after only 8 classes, they will try to get you to sign up for the Black Belt Club (\$259/month) or Leadership Program (\$359/month). The owner justifies this by saying that most people won’t check around and if you charge more people will think it’s better.

Question #1: What are you looking for?

The first key thing you must consider before choosing a school is what you are looking for.

We have a great variety of people who come to us, each one looking for something a little different.

We get people who haven't touched their toes in ten years to those who just got out of the

Marines. We get Olympic hopefuls who want to focus on competition, as well as parents who just wish their kid could sit still through school.



If you know what you are looking for, you will be able to see if each school will fit your needs. Some schools are geared only towards Mixed Martial Arts or Cagefighting, while others are extremely traditional and never have contact between students.

Here are a few common things that people are looking for, and specific ways that good training can help them:

Discipline- Discipline is one of the main areas that we focus on at KAT. The structure is very beneficial to children and adults. It is very common to see results within a few months for most children.

Confidence- Martial arts training challenges students; but more importantly it **gives them the tools to overcome those challenges.** When repeated over and over, this process builds *tremendous confidence* in our students.



Self Defense- Our school teaches a grappling component that teaches students realistic self defense. We also teach free self defense to the community every Saturday morning.

Better Grades- KAT students consistently outperform their peers in an academic setting. We monitor all of the students grades at each promotion so that we can catch any problems early and provide the students with free tutoring and academic help.

Weight Loss/Exercise- Taekwondo is a great aerobic workout. It is common for overweight people to lose about 20 pounds in the first month of training.

Question #2: Who Will Be Teaching You?

Once you know what you want to get out of it, the next most important thing to know is who will be teaching you. Most schools have one head instructor, who may or may not teach all of the classes. Find out who will teach the majority of the classes, and learn the answers to the following questions.

Is the teacher a professional? There are many schools, especially in recreation centers, where the main teacher will teach martial arts as a hobby, usually for no more than 5-10 hours a week. **Many of these people are good instructors, but teaching is not what they have dedicated their lives to.** They're hobbyists, not professionals. Again, there's nothing wrong with this. However, if you were going in for surgery, would you want someone who practiced medicine 5 hours a week? Or would you want someone who has the experience of performing thousands of the same surgery you're having? Professional teachers are forced to become better teachers if they want to put food on their tables. Professional teachers also are much more likely to spend many hours outside of class training themselves, studying, and learning and perfecting new teaching techniques.



Is the instructor qualified? There *is no government licensing of martial arts schools*, so this can be hard to know. However, if you Google the body that accredited him you can see if it's a world recognized governing body or just something the instructor made up himself. Our instructors at KAT are certified by the Kukkiwon (World Taekwondo Federation), a recognized world authority for Taekwondo. Do a Google Search on the instructor's name. Are there videos

of him competing or teaching? Has he written articles or books about the arts? Or is he cussing out people on Facebook?

What is his or her personality like? Does he seem like someone who is genuinely interested in helping you or your child? Does he come off as mean-spirited, or belittle students in class? Does the master really love martial arts?

What is the atmosphere of the class? A great class will be fun but serious work will be going on. Do the students look up to and respect the teacher? Do the students respect and encourage each other, or are they mean spirited towards those who make mistakes? The influence of the teacher will ultimately determine atmosphere of the class.

Is the teacher a learner? This might seem strange to ask at first, but it is important. Does the teacher cross train in other martial arts? Is he actively involved in learning new

business practices and key concepts? Does the teacher have an advanced college degree? Remember, martial arts is something we study, not just something we do. If your teacher is not a learner, you're limited in what you can learn from him to the facts he knows right now.

Does the teacher demonstrate the benefits of training? If someone tells you they will teach you self confidence, but lacks it himself, how will he teach you? Would you trust a severely overweight and out of shape person to teach you how to be more physically fit? *If martial arts training really does improve your life, why hasn't it worked with the teacher?*

What About Assistants? Most good schools will have other instructors or assistant instructors who may help the main instructor. Are assistant instructors just black belts who are thrown into class, or are they prepared with a comprehensive training program? Do the assistants seem like they will be great instructors one day?

Admittedly, these things might be hard to ascertain after just a limited time of knowing someone. **And, there are exceptions to every rule.** These are just some good rule of thumb questions to think about.

Question 3: Where Will You Train?

The facility that you train at is important. Is it a safe and welcoming place? Here at KAT we've taken great lengths to make sure our facilities are world class.

We have padded floors, high tech LCD projection TV systems, and life sized human-shaped targets. We have safe, comfortable training areas. At our Littleton school, we constructed a *custom made, state of the art 'floating' floor* to help reduce injuries and allow for advanced tricks and throws.



Although there may be some poor facilities with good teachers, the facility is another sign of the professionalism of the school. Consider if this is the kind of place you want to spend several hours a week in for the next few years.

Question 4: What is the School's History

When choosing a martial arts school, **history is important**. Many people think that it would be fun to open a school, so **schools are popping up and down all of the time**. Certainly, just because a school is young does not mean that it is not a good school.

However, according to the Small Business Association (www.sba.gov) over 50% of all businesses fail in the first 5 years!

The rate of martial arts schools that fail is probably even higher, because people think that just because they are good at martial arts, they can be a good teacher or good owner. **Imagine enrolling in a school, paying tuition and working hard for years to get close to becoming a black belt, and then showing up one day to find the school closed!** That scenario has happened many times, and often students will have to completely start over at the new school.

While there is no way to guarantee that a school will be there for years, a school that has been there for a long time has a much better chance of surviving into the future. Our school is [nearly three decades old](#), and we are learning new ways to improve it all the time. We also have in depth contingency plans and numerous qualified assistants so that our school could survive even a tragedy in the life of the owner.

The following is some information on the long history of KAT:

Press clipping from newspaper and magazine articles, tv reports, etc.
<http://www.kattaekwondo.com/press.htm>

Question 5: How Many Students Are There?

Most new schools start with only a few students, but if a school has been open for a year or more and has less than 50 or 60 students, that would probably mean that they either have a hard time convincing people to join or a hard time convincing them to stay. While smaller schools might (or might not) give you more individualized training, they will probably also offer you less classes to choose from. When it comes time to train against partners, there will be *few people your size and skill*. Also, schools with only a few students may have a harder time paying the rent and staying in business.

On the other hand, if a school is too large (maybe over 400 students or so in one location) it might be difficult for them to give you good service. The classes might also be so big that you wouldn't get enough personal attention.

Question 6: What Is The Role of Tournaments?

The role of tournaments in a school is another important factor to consider, *even if you do not want to be a competitor*. Some schools refuse to attend any tournaments, or just host private tournaments **where only their students can participate**.



There can be problems with the organization, fairness, etc. of some tournaments. However, tournaments are an important ‘*reality check*’ on how well the training is working. **In good schools, their students will be able to defeat students of similar age, weight, and experience from other schools.** Often schools that refuse to compete with others do so because they feel that their students will leave if they see that other schools are doing better. *Most top schools will regularly train with and scrimmage against other schools to make sure that their students are at the top of their game.*

On the other hand, some schools will focus almost completely on tournaments and competitive accomplishments. The master might spend 80% of his time working with the few competitors, neglecting the other students. This might be great if tournament competition was your primary goal, not so great if you have other goals.

At KAT we try to achieve balance by having a special Competition Team with coaches who work to make sure the team members are in top form. Tournament attendance is ***optional, not required.*** We also keep things in perspective by remembering that competition is only a part of our training, a means to an end.

Question #7: What Is The Atmosphere?

The atmosphere of the martial arts school is very important. Although this might be hard to understand after just a few classes, talk to other students and parents. Martial arts is often referred to as a family, and students will often spend time together outside of class.

There is a strong sense that martial arts is a family, and there is good reason for it. In our school we have a banner that says “*KAT Family. When one of us succeeds, all of us succeed.*” Although it’s true that at the end of the day, no one else can step into the ring for you, you also can’t train alone. You need a variety of partners, some bigger but slower than you, some faster but less experienced, etc. We are a family who works to push and prepare all of our members.



At the same time it’s also like a family because we have members from all different ages and backgrounds. *Older, higher ranking students act like extra older brothers and sisters*

to the newer, younger students. We recognize that we're all in this together. You won't have just one teacher- everyone is a teacher and a student as well. Yellow belts will be proud to help the white belts, even if it's just on how to tie their belts or bow when entering the class. Getting help in your training from so many sources is part of how good schools are able to produce the results that they do.

Question #8: What about Values?

A good martial arts school will value developing the character of its students over just teaching them how to kick and punch. One of the most important things that we stress at KAT is developing the character of our students. With no character development or improper character development, *all schools really do is end up turning out stronger bullies.* **Proper training will stress learning over winning, honor over ill gotten gains, and honesty with self and others.**



At KAT we constantly work to make our students better people and not just better martial artists. We have a “*Word of the Month*” that helps teach a certain value each and every month. When students are ready to move up to a new rank, **we check their report card in school and parents also fill out a report card on how they are doing at home.**

Turning around problem students is never easy and rarely quick, but we do have many success stories of people that we have turned away from troubled paths **as a direct result of the training and guidance they received here at KAT.** We also have many single mothers who bring their children into the school to have a good male role model.

At the end of the day, we hope that you never have to use what you have learned to defend yourself on the street. However, you **will use** the **character education, confidence, and discipline** that you learn in your everyday life. It's a simple fact that confident, disciplined, motivated people succeed in life, no matter what goals they set for themselves.

Question #9: What is the Curriculum?

Curriculum refers to what you will actually be learning. Most schools have a **Belt Curriculum** (*The main things that you have to know to get each new belt*) as well as **Extras** (*Optional things that they will teach but you will not be required to learn*)

From a self defense point of view, the **curriculum must be comprehensive.** While it's impossible to practice every conceivable situation, it's important that the school will

teach you what to do over a range of different distances. (*A great punch is as useless from 6 feet away as a great sliding kick is on the ground*). They should teach you how to defend yourself against different attackers, attackers with weapons, defend yourself with words, etc. You should also become **physically stronger**, and **mentally able** to choose the right technique to use against the right opponent. While this might seem obvious, *many schools will either teach you only things to do while standing up, only grappling on the ground, or only things that work once you're stretched out.*



The curriculum should be **organized and available**. Good schools have put their requirements on video, and make them available to the students. If the curriculum is available ahead of time, you can see what you will be learning one or two years down the line. Some schools are constantly changing what you have to know to get a belt, and this makes it very difficult for most students to learn.

Finally, the curriculum should have some 'extras' that are optional. In our school we have a **weapons program** and a **demonstration team** that performs all over (Nuggets Games, Festivals, etc). In the summer time we host special training seminars in the mountains, as well as a 'survival training' weekend where students learn to keep themselves safe in the wilderness. Finally, we also host various seminars on financial well being, nutrition, physics, etc.

Part of the curriculum includes the **Training Schedule**. Is the schedule flexible? *Are you limited to attending class only once or twice per week?* If you miss class on Wednesday, can you make up class on Thursday? What about multiple classes per day? **Students training three or four times per week will progress much more quickly than those training only once per week!** Also, consider not only the price per month, but the price per class.

When checking into the schedule, see if classes are open to all students who have the right level/age, or if you will need to join a "Black Belt Club" or "Leadership Team" to attend many of the classes.



I hope that this information has been helpful. Martial Arts Training can be a wonderful part of life that will give you benefits unavailable in any other single activity. I feel so confident in the quality of the Korean Academy of Taekwondo, I would like to invite you to come in, see the school, and try a class out for free. There's **no obligation**, and you'll be able to see if training is something you're interested in. If you haven't done so already, please contact us at (303) 743-7767 to schedule your free trial class. We've been in the Aurora community for **29 years now, because we've consistently been able to show students these benefits in their lives.**

Sincerely,

Master Bill Pottle

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