

GRIP FIGHTING

By Steve Scott

Any grip that works for you with a good rate of rate of success is a good grip. The throw you choose to use is almost always originated from the grip that you control your opponent with or counter with. Knowing the many ways to grip, grab, manipulate and control your opponent's jacket, belt, pants, shorts, head, shoulders, arms, hands, legs or any body part or any part of his clothing is essential to knowing how to apply an effective throw. Everything is a handle with which you grab and control your opponent.



Connecting to Your Opponent: Using your hands to grab your opponent is the primary way of connecting your body to his, but you should learn how to use your arms, elbows, shoulders, hips and any part of your body possible to control him. Generally, if you are a right-handed thrower, your right hand/arm is the “steering hand/arm” and your left hand/arm is the “leading hand/arm.” The Japanese consider the right hand the tsurite or “lifting hand” and the left hand the hikite or the “pulling hand.” If you think of your grip on your opponent's jacket in the same way you would think of wrapping a belt or rope around him, you have a good concept of how to control your opponent with your grip. If you successfully control your opponent's grip,

you are “tying him up” with the grip, controlling and breaking his posture, controlling his body movement, controlling the tempo of the action and ultimately, controlling how you throw him to the mat. Your grip is the first link in how you throw your opponent. Your posture, and your opponent's posture, is part of how you grip with him and dictates the type of throw you will choose to attack or counter with. The space between your hips and your opponent's hips dictates the posture and often dictates whom you will choose to grip fight with him.

Guidelines for Grip Fighting

Here are some practical guidelines to know and apply every time you engage with an opponent. The whole idea is to control your opponent, so it's important to try to achieve the dominant grip as often as possible.

However, that doesn't always happen in a judo match, so if you've been placed in a defensive situation, it's also vital to know how to neutralize and counter your opponent's grip; and then go on to gain the dominant grip.

Remember, the end result in getting the grip is to throw your opponent and win the match. Grip fighting is simply a means to an end and is a set of necessary (and important) tools for you to achieve your ultimate goal of throwing your opponent.



1-Immediately after you start the fight or match, or after any break in the action and you start again, hold your hands up at chest level with your palms facing your opponent so that you pretend you are looking at your opponent through a television screen or picture frame. This is a good ready posture and you are prepared to attack and defend.

2-Always try to get your hands on your opponent first and get the dominant grip. Don't fight on his terms and don't let him have the better grip or tie up. Be aggressive in getting your grip. How you grip fight or fight for the tie up not only puts you in a position to attack him better, but it lets your opponent know you mean business. Your initial contact with your opponent is that grip. Be the one who takes control and dictates the terms of the fight.

3-If you can't get the dominant grip, try to break his grip and counter with your own grip or tie up. If you can't counter and get the dominant grip, at least get a neutral grip.

4-If you have to initially be in a neutral grip or tie up situation with your opponent, work hard to dominate the grip. You want all the odds in your favor and a neutral grip gives him as good of a chance to throw as you have of throwing him-so do everything you can to get the dominant grip.

5-Your grip should lead to something. Use your grip or tie up to set your opponent up for your throw or takedown. Your throw flows naturally from your grip. Make sure the grip you use works best for the throw you want to use.

6-Try not to let your opponent get both hands on you. If he's a one-handed fighter, he can't control you as well as if he has both hands on you.

7-Never, ever grab with the same hand as your lead leg. In other words, if you lead with your left leg, don't grab your opponent initially with your left hand. Instead, if your lead (sugar) foot or leg is the left one, reach with your right hand to get your initial grip. This way, you're not off-balance and allowing your opponent to foot sweep you or attack you with another throw or takedown.



8-Use your steering hand as "radar." You can feel the direction your opponent is moving with your hands that are gripping onto your opponent's jacket. Often, your grip on your opponent's lapel will give you enough "feel" as to where he will move his body. If you are a right-handed fighter, try to use your right hand to feel your opponent's movements, whether your right hand is on his lapel in the middle of his chest, on his back or shoulder; really anywhere that you can feel his movement. I used to train with a guy who was a left-handed fighter and he

liked to keep his left hand planted on his opponent's chest; right in the middle if he could. He told me that this was his "radar" and he could feel if his opponent turned, even slightly.

9-Neutrlize your opponent's steering hand. If he's a right-handed judoka and wants to get his right hand on you, grip it first and keep it pushed down and away from you so he can't get his hand on you. This ties in with making him a one-handed fighter.

10-Emphasize your steering hand. If you are a right-handed fighter, this is your right hand. This is called the tsurite (lifting hand). However, this hand does more than simply lift your opponent, you use it to steer and control your opponent. Your left hand would then assist in getting the grip, pulling him, fending off his hand, or any variety of uses. The steering hand is also called the "power" hand and this is a good description as well, but remember that the purpose of this hand is to steer your opponent.

11-Getting the thumb caught in the opponent's lapel when grabbing it is a weak grip. This often leads to a "floating elbow," the malady that happens when a judoka attacks with a right-sided throw and his right elbow goes up in the air, often with the right wrist bent and ineffective. By getting your thumb stuck in your opponent's collar at his neck, you are limiting yourself in how you attack and defend.



12-Your posture is important. Shoulders over hips and lower your levels with your legs; this means that your shoulders should be directly over your hips with a straight back and good posture. Don't bend forward with your buttocks sticking out and your shoulders leaning forward (this puts your body off-balance forward). If you must get lower than your opponent or like to fight from this position, lower your level with your legs and don't bend forward at the waist.

13-Your weight distribution should be 50/50 (fifty percent of your weight is placed on one leg and fifty percent of your weight is on the other) most of the time. Try to have your weight distributed evenly and don't place too much weight in your heels. Don't be "heavy footed" and try to stay on the balls of your feet. Be graceful and don't plod.

14-Here's an old rule, but one that still works; don't cross your feet. You're asking to get thrown or taken to the mat. Not only that, you are off balance when you cross your legs or feet and you can't attack or defend quickly.

15-Once you attach onto your opponent with a grip; stay attached to him so you can achieve a throw. If you need to change your grip, don't let go unless he's beaten you to the grip and is controlling you and you are forced to break free and re-grip.



16-Always use two hands to control or attack your opponent's one hand. In other words, if your opponent comes in to grip with you and leads with his one hand, it's easier to deflect his one hand with your two. You can counter-grip more effectively using both hands when possible. A good example is for you to "kill" (or neutralize) your opponent's right-hand lead. You grab his hand with both of yours, then when you pull it down to neutralize it, you can adjust your counter-grip and get the grip useful to you.

17-Avoid moving directly backward or running forward directly to your opponent. Moving directly back or forward is too easy for your opponent to throw you. By moving back in a straight line or backing away from your opponent, you appear to be passive and the referee may penalize you for it. Don't back up; instead try to move in angles and if you have to move to avoid him, try to move laterally.

18-If you break your opponent's grip or tie up, don't back up or back away. This is perfect time to re-grip or counter grip and take the offensive. If you back away as you and you and your opponent lose grip of each other, it appears passive to a referee.

19-Use your head as a wedge to break the grip, if necessary. Sometimes, you may have to bury your head on your opponent's chest, shoulder or even his arm and use it as a wedge to open up the distance between your bodies. You may even use your head to shuck your opponent's grip on your collar or lapel, or use your head to duck under your opponent's arm or shoulder to get to the outside. You can even wedge your head on your opponent's head or neck to gain an advantage. Rene Pommerelle used to call using your head this way as your "third arm."

20-Don't get saddled thinking that you can only grip with a neutral grip (or the head and arm, or collar tie-up). While this is the basic grip used to learn new throwing skills with, remember it's only one of the many ways you can grip or tie up an opponent. Don't fall in love with a grip for any reason other than it works and is the best to use to throw an opponent. Be willing and prepared to change grips to suit the situation.

21-Control his shoulders. You can "steer" him by controlling his shoulders and manipulate his body better. Also, "kill his shoulder" by forcing his near shoulder down low. Doing this makes him weaker and he can't mount an attack or defense.

22-Don't only use your hands to control your opponent. Your hands grab him, but your elbows, arms, shoulders and head all help in steering your opponent and controlling his movement.

23-This is the most important rule of grip fighting; any grip that works for you (and is allowed by the rules of your sport) is good.