

# The Blue Belt Roadmap

By Patrick Donabedian

Congrats on taking serious action to level up your game! Your blue belt is likely a lot closer than you think. Below is a straightforward checklist that will make crystal clear what holes exist in your game and what you must learn to become a legitimate blue belt.

I'll start by cluing you in on a little secret: **Your professor desperately wants to promote you.**

They'll never admit it, but it's true. It's true for the same reason that online belts exist and why kid karate Dojos give out black belts like candy--it makes for fantastic marketing and student retention.

But now, with viral videos and gyms hosting open-mats on every corner, a healthy system of checks and balances has developed. If you don't believe me, google "Fake Black Belt Exposed".

So what does this mean? Do you have to be a world-beater to get your blue belt? An encyclopedia of BJJ? Have an impassable guard? Count to 10 in Portuguese?

No. It comes down to three of BJJ's most profound truths:

1. Don't look stupid while rolling (aka behave like a blue belt)
2. Know the core offensive and defensive techniques within **BJJ's 6 Essential Beginner Positions**
3. Have a practical action plan for any real life self-defense situation

Let's get started with these and tons of bonus material below!



**Patrick Donabedian**

***Your Virtual Jiu-Jitsu Coach***

# Table of Contents

First, Don't Look Stupid: BJJ Behavior, Movement, & Terminology	3
<b>BJJ's 6 Essential Beginner Positions &amp; Techniques</b>	4-8
Don't Forget Street Survival Tactics!	8
<u>Bonus Checklists</u>	
Stand-up: Takedowns & Guard Pulls	8-9
Ashi Garami (Leg Entanglements)	9
Gi vs No-gi Chokes	10
Specialty Attack Systems (10th Planet)	10
Mental Performance: BJJ Goal Setting	10-11
Live Roll Self-Assessment Tool	11

# The Blue Belt Checklist

**A note before we begin:** This checklist has been used most effectively by my students who treat it as a living document. By putting pen to paper, it will serve as a progress journal and reference guide where you can fill in technical details and concepts from class and internet research. Therefore I strongly encourage you to print and place it somewhere you can see it everyday for continual update. Just wait and see how your knowledge and confidence skyrocket as more boxes get checked and notes fill up the white space! And don't worry, it starts off pretty easy so you'll get on the scoreboard quickly.

## BJJ Behavior, Movement, & Terminology

### Solo Functional Movements

- Breakfall (both hands/one hand)
- Shrimp (hip escape)
- Bridge ("upa" or hip bump)
- Technical stand-up

### Notes/Drill Tally

### Grips & Terminology:

- Gable Grip (monkey grip)
- S Grip
- Ball & Socket Grip
- Hook Grip (gi)
- Lapel Grip (gi)
- Overhooks vs Underhooks
- Seatbelt (over-under)

### Gripping Don'ts:

- Interlacing thumbs on gable grip
- Interlacing fingers (yoga grip, self "mercy" grip)

- \*\*Gi only\*\***Grabbing inside the pants
- Grabbing opponent's individual fingers

## The 6 Essential Beginner Positions

**\*Checklist Override:** For any position that you have an alternative technique that is undeniably successful for you, it can override the others I've listed.

### 1. Closed Guard:

### Alt. Search Terms

### Notes/Drill Tally

#### Bottom CG Submissions

- |   |              |
|---|--------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Triangle Choke | Pop Triangle |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Armbar         |              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Omoplata       |              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Kimura         |              |

#### Bottom CG Sweeps

- Kimura Hip Bump Sweep
- Pendulum Sweep
- Scissor Sweep
- \*Checklist Override: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Top CG Breaks & Passes

- |  |                   |
|--|-------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> One standing closed guard break |                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> One kneeling closed guard break |                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Kneecut pass                    | kneeslice pass    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Stack pass                      | Double under pass |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Kneeling double leg pass        |                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Windshield wipe pass            |                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Checklist Override: _____       |                   |

#### Top CG Don'ts

- Attempt submission from inside opponent's closed guard

- Spin/turn back to opponent while passing
- Voluntarily place one arm inside and other outside of opponents legs

## 2. Half Guard

### Alt. Search Terms

### Notes/Drill Tally

#### Top Half Passes

- Head & arm pass kneecut pass, no hand pass
- Twister pass (face legs push knee free)
- Checklist Override: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Bottom Half Sweeps & Recoveries

- Hip escape closed guard recovery
- Underhook to Dogfight Sweep or Backtake
- \*Checklist Override: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Bottom Half Don'ts

- Trying to guillotine choke your opponent
- Leave your opponents leg wide open

## 3. Side Control

### Alt. Search Terms

### Notes/Drill Tally

#### Top SC Positions/Transitions/Subs

- Knee-on-Belly Control
- North/South Control
- Kneecut to mount
- Kimura armlock
- Americana armlock
- Far side underhook spinning armbar
- Darce Choke

#### Bottom SC Escapes

- Shrimp escape to closed/half guard
- Underhook to single leg Turtle escape

- |   |                      |
|---|----------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> High leg escape                | Head scissor         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Trap, Bridge and Roll Reversal | Shoulder Roll Escape |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Knee on belly escape           | Ankle trap           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> North/South escape             | Inversion escape     |

**Bottom SC Don'ts:**

- Try to bench press your opponent off in side control.
- Turn away/sit-up/expose your back when someone passes your guard
- Hug opponent's head (e.g. guillotine or half-nelson)

**Top SC Don'ts:**

- Hug head on the far side instead of underhook ("judo side control")

**4. Mount**

**Alt. Search Terms**

**Notes/Drill Tally**

**Top Mount Submissions**

- Americana
- Arm triangle choke
- Armbar
- \*\*Gi only\*\* Cross Collar Choke
- \*\*Gi only\*\* Ezekial Choke
- \*Checklist Override:\_\_\_\_\_

**Bottom Mount Escapes/Recoveries:**

- |   |                 |
|---|-----------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Elbow escape                 |                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hip bump to butterfly escape |                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Foot capture escape          | Ankle Capture   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Trap and Roll Reversal       | Bridging Escape |

**Bottom Mount Don'ts:**

- Automatically turn belly down
- Reach arms and push off opponent's chest

## 5. Back Mount

### Alt. Search Terms

### Notes/Drill Tally

#### Offensive Back Submissions:

- Rear Naked Choke
- \*\*Gi Only\*\*** Rear Collar Choke      Bow & Arrow Choke
- \*Checklist Override: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Offensive Back Entries

- Chairsit from opponent turtled
- Rolling Back Take

#### Bottom Back Mount Escapes:

- Turtle Escape
- Sliding Elbow Escape      Head on mat, underside, overside

#### Back Mount Don'ts:

- Crossed ankles with offensive back control

## 6. Open Guard

### Alt. Search Terms

### Notes/Drill Tally

#### Open guard bottom sweeps/subs

(must know 1 or more)

- Butterfly Guard
- De la Riva/RDLR Guard
- Reverse de la Riva Guard
- X-guard/Ashi Garami
- Deep half Guard
- Gi Only: Spider/Lasso Guard
- \*Checklist Override \_\_\_\_\_

#### Open Guard Passes

(must know 1 or more)

- Standing Torreando Pass      Bullfighter pass

- Standing Speed Kneecut Pass Kneeslice pass
- Kneeling Double leg Pass
- Kneeling over-under Pass
- \*Checklist Override: \_\_\_\_\_

**Open Guard Don'ts**

- Wrestle opponent from knees

## Street Survival Tactics

**Male Self-Defense Scenarios**

**Notes/Plan of Action**

- Crowded bar sucker puncher
- Trapped in alley way with mugger at distance
- Drunk friend/uncle at Thanksgiving

**Female Self Defense Scenarios**

- Pinned against wall by the neck
- Dragged from front via wrists
- Dragged from behind via bear hug
- Pinned on back (sexual assault)
- Pinned on stomach (sexual assault)

## Stand-Up: Takedowns & Guard Pulls

**Takedowns**

**Alt. Search Terms**

**Notes/Drill Tally**

- Body Lock Fold
- Rear Body Lock Falling Back-take
- Front Head Lock to Backtake
- One Variation: Hip Toss Takedown

- One Variation: Single Leg Takedown
- One Variation: Double Leg Takedown

### **Guard Pulls**

- Foot on Hip Guard Pull
- Under/Overhooks Sitting Butterfly Guard Pull

### **Submissions/Takedown Counters**

- Guillotine Choke
- Sprawl Takedown Defense

### **Standup Don'ts:**

- Shoot a takedown bent at the waist with eyes pointing to ground
- Jump closed guard (dangerous)
- Flying scissor takedown (dangerous)

## **Ashi Garami (Leg Entanglements)**

### **Sweeps**

- One Single-Leg X Sweep
- One X-Guard Sweep

### **Alt. Search Terms**

### **Notes/Drill Tally**

### **Submissions**

- Achilles Lock (straight ankle lock)
- Heel Hook **\*\*only nogi, if school permits\*\***
- Toehold **\*\*if school permits\*\***
- Kneebar **\*\*if school permits\*\***

### **Defense**

- Achilles Lock Defense Boot and Sit over

- Heel Hook Defense Boot/Ballerina, disentangle, free kneeline

### Ashi Garami Don'ts

- Spin Recklessly on defense
- Crank on offense (instead of lock) catch & release attitude

## Gi vs No-gi Chokes

### Gi Specific Chokes:

- Cross Collar Choke
- Ezekiel coke
- Rear collar choke
- Lapel Baseball Choke

### Alt. Search Terms

### Notes/Drill Tally

### Nogi-Specific Chokes:

- Guillotine choke
- Rear Naked choke
- Gable grip baseball choke

## Affiliate-Specialty Techniques

### Ex: 10th Planet Jiu Jitsu:

### Alt. Search Terms

### Notes/Drill Tally

- The Truck, Twister, & Leg Attacks
- The Electric Chair & Dogfight

## Goal Setting for BJJ

### Do (examples):

- I will attend fundamentals class at least 3 days/week for the next month (then set incremental new goal)
- I will drill 50 reps of [specific guard-pass] each week for the next 2 weeks

## **Don't:**

- I will get my blue belt in 1-year (could take longer or shorter; false expectations often lead to quitting)
- I have to win a tournament before I get my blue belt

## **Promotion Acceleration Tips:**

- 1 Two-a-day per month (or every 2 weeks)**- guaranteed to land on professor's radar if he sees you twice in one day
- Try not to switch schools**- unless clear problem/barrier to healthy training -- will lose lots of time. You can still switch after blue belt.
- Off-day drilling**- shrimp, bridge, pop triangles, inversion holds, technical stands at home

# **The Live Roll Self-Assessment Tool**

## **Level 1 Opponent: same size, no experience**

Can sweep from bottom to dominant top position, can submit from bottom or top

## **Level 2 Opponent: bigger, no experience**

Can maintain guard from bottom position, can defend punches, can stand & separate

## **Level 3 Opponent: same size, equal experience**

Can recover guard, can defend punches, can sometimes sweep, pass, and submit

## **Level 4 Opponent: bigger, equal experience**

Can prevent submissions and punches from side control, can recover guard, can sometimes stand & separate

If you can check all 4 of these boxes, then you're likely ready for your promotion. Feel free to email me at [pat@patrickdonabedian.com](mailto:pat@patrickdonabedian.com) to let me know what you thought about this list. Did

some part help you? Was it missing something important that your professor taught you?  
Struggling with any technique in particular? We're all pushing to improve so please be honest!

Best,

Patrick Donabedian