

# 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 | 3-4        |
| <b>BJJ's 6 Essential Beginner Positions &amp; Techniques</b>    | <b>4-8</b> |
| 5-Minute Street-Ready BJJ Checklist                             | 8-9        |
| <br><u>Bonus Checklists</u>                                     |            |
| Stand-up: Takedowns & Guard Pulls                               | 9          |
| Ashi Garami (Leg Entanglements, X-Guard)                        | 10         |
| Gi vs No-Gi Chokes  | 10         |
| Specialty Attack Systems (10th Planet)                          | 11         |
| Mental Performance: BJJ Goal Setting                            | 11         |
| Live Roll Self-Assessment Tool                                  | 11-12      |

# The Blue Belt Roadmap

## Two notes before you begin:

1. **What deserves a checkmark?** You can demonstrate each step of the technique fluidly and have successfully executed it at least 3 times against resisting opponents.
2. **Print and mark it up.** This checklist has been used most effectively by students who put pen to paper. I strongly encourage you to do the same. It will serve as both progress journal and reference guide where you can fill in technical details and concepts from class and internet research. Your knowledge and confidence will 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

### Notes/Drill Tally

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

### Grips & Terminology:

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

## 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

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# BJJ's 6 Essential Beginner Positions & Techniques

**\*Checklist Override:** For certain positions, if 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

- ☐ Triangle Choke
- ☐ Armbar
- ☐ Omoplata
- ☐ Kimura

Pop Triangle

#### Bottom CG Sweeps

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

#### Top CG Breaks, Passes, and Defenses

- ☐ One standing closed guard break
- ☐ One kneeling closed guard break
- ☐ Kneecut pass (cross and straight)
- ☐ Stack pass
- ☐ Sprawling double leg pass
- ☐ One Triangle Defense

kneeslice pass, windshield wipe pass

Double under pass

### 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 (manually push knee free)
- ☐ Checklist Override: \_\_\_\_\_

### Bottom Half Sweeps, Recoveries & Defenses

- ☐ Hip escape closed guard recovery
- ☐ Underhook to Dogfight Sweep or Backtake
- ☐ John Wayne Sweep
- ☐ D'arce / Guillotine choke defense
- ☐ \*Checklist Override: \_\_\_\_\_

### Bottom Half Don'ts

- ☐ Trying to guillotine choke your opponent
- ☐ Leaving opponent's leg wide open to pass

## 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 & Recoveries

☐ Shrimp escape to closed/half guard

☐ Underhook to single leg Turtle escape

☐ High leg guard recovery Head scissor

☐ Trap and Roll SC Reversal Shoulder Roll Escape

☐ One knee on belly escape Ankle trap

☐ One North/South escape Inversion escape

☐ Americana Defense

☐ Kimura Defense

### 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 (Kesa Gatame or "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

### Bottom Mount Escapes/Recoveries

- ☐ Elbow escape
- ☐ Hip bump to butterfly escape
- ☐ Foot capture escape                      Ankle Capture
- ☐ 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
- ☐ Kimura Giftwrap from Mount or Side

### Bottom Back Mount Escapes

- ☐ One Turtle Escape
- ☐ One Under-side Escape                      Head on mat, leg press, floor scrape
- ☐ One Over-side Escape                      Baseball bat, turn in, floor scrape

### Back Mount Don'ts:

- ☐ Crossed ankles with offensive back control

**Bottom Open guard 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 \_\_\_\_\_

**Top Open Guard Passes & Defenses** (must know 1 or more)

- ☐ Standing Torreando Pass                      Bullfighter pass
- ☐ Standing Speed Kneecut Pass                      Kneeslice pass
- ☐ Kneeling Double leg Pass
- ☐ Kneeling over-under Pass
- ☐ One Guillotine defense
- ☐ \*Checklist Override: \_\_\_\_\_

**Open Guard Don'ts**

- ☐ Wrestle opponent from knees

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## **5-Minute Street-Ready BJJ Checklist**

**Male Self-Defense Scenarios****Notes/Plan of Action**

- ☐ Crowded bar sucker puncher
- ☐ Trapped in alleyway with mugger at distance
- ☐ Drunk friend/uncle at Thanksgiving
- ☐ On bottom and mounted by puncher
- ☐ Choked from behind while standing



## **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 situation)
  - ☐ Pinned on stomach (sexual assault situation)
- 

## **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, X-Guard)

## Sweeps

☐ Single-Leg X Tilt Sweep

☐ One X-Guard Sweep

## Alt. Search Terms

X trip, X technical stand, X ankle pick

## Notes/Drill Tally

## Submissions

☐ Achilles Lock (straight ankle lock)

☐ Heel Hook \*\*only no-gi, if school permits\*\*

☐ Toehold \*\*if school permits\*\*

☐ Kneebar \*\*if school permits\*\*

## Defense

☐ One Achilles Lock Defense

Boot and Sit Over, Stand and disentangle

☐ One Heel Hook Defense

Boot/Ballerina, disentangle, spiral to free kneeline

## Ashi Garami Don'ts

☐ Spin Recklessly on defense (TAP EARLY AND OFTEN)

☐ Crank on any submission (unsafe)

catch & release attitude

☐ Reap (when training in Gi)

okay for no-gi, bad strategy for sweeping

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## Gi vs No-gi Chokes

### Gi Specific Chokes:

☐ Cross Collar Choke

☐ Ezekiel choke

☐ 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
  - ☐ Your professor's/affiliate specialty 1: \_\_\_\_\_
  - ☐ Your professor's/affiliate specialty 2: \_\_\_\_\_
- 

## 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; good for you to crystallize memory of techniques
- ☐ **Try not to switch schools**- unless clear gym problem or life happens -- 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 stand & separate, can sometimes sweep

If you can check all 4 of these boxes, then you're likely ready for your promotion.

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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? Is there any part you're uncertain about? Struggling with any technique in particular?

Lastly, I've laid out for you a long road ahead with many boxes to check. So remember to print it out, mark it up with notes, and keep it as a living document to help you progress through this important phase of your Jiu-Jitsu journey.

Sincerely,

Patrick Donabedian