

A Roadmap for Brazilian Jiu-jitsu

How To Progress FAST
In Brazilian Jiu-jitsu



by Stephan Kesting
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Edition 1.4

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About the Author

Stephan began his martial arts training in 1981. He currently holds the following ranks and certifications:

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Stephan created and operates Grapplearts.com. He has helped tens of thousands of grapplers improve their skills via his articles, videos, instructional DVDs and instructional apps for iPhone, iPad, Android and Kindle devices.

He has published more than 20 articles in magazines like Black Belt, Ultimate Grappling, Tapout, and Ultimate Athlete. Interviews with Stephan have been featured on many different podcasts and martial arts websites.

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We'll be going through a ton of information in this book, and I'm sure you're going to like it. But one of the best things you can do, however, is to go and download the accompanying [Roadmap for BJJ app](#) right away. Then you can use the book and free app together so that you can start dominating on the mats even quicker.

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Let's Get Started! First, Why is Brazilian Jiu-jitsu so complicated?

The initial stages of learning Brazilian jiu-jitsu (BJJ) can be a confusing, frustrating and overwhelming process.

This confusion is understandable: grappling is complex, and it's easy to get lost in the multitude of techniques and details before you ever reach any level of mastery in the sport. Because of this complexity many people quit the art prematurely, and thus never get a chance to experience the joy and excitement of this exciting sport, which is also an incredibly effective martial art.

As I just stated, grappling is complex. It is, in fact, MORE complex than most other martial arts.

Let's consider boxing for a second, which really only has 5 or 6 different punches (*i.e.* jab, cross, hook, uppercut, overhand, etc.). Add in a few defenses and a bit of footwork, and you basically have the entire boxing system in a nutshell. I'm not saying that boxing isn't effective – it's a great system and at the higher levels it is very subtle - but it just doesn't have very many individual techniques to learn.

Grappling, by contrast, has at least 6 primary positions (compared to one or two stances in boxing). Each of these 6 positions needs to be trained both on top and bottom, and on the right and left.

After that there are many additional variations of each position.

Then for each of these positions you can apply a huge number of different transitions, submissions, escapes and defenses. It's easy to see why BJJ has hundreds and hundreds of distinct techniques, and why new students can quickly feel overwhelmed.

So what should a beginner do to make sense of all this technique? How can he organize his knowledge and decide what he should learn next? Part of the solution is to recognize that there are only 6 primary BJJ positions.

The 6 Primary Positions

If you watch any BJJ sparring, be it in class or at a tournament, you will see that the combatants spend about 90% of their time on the ground in one of the following positions:

1. Guard
2. Side Mount
3. Knee Mount
4. Mount
5. Rear Mount
6. Turtle



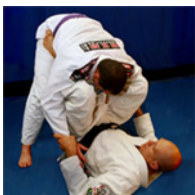
The most complex of these 6 fundamental BJJ positions is the Guard. The Guard position is very central to the art of BJJ, and it is useful to subdivide it into three additional subpositions:

- 1a. Closed Guard
- 1b. Open Guard
- 1c. Half Guard

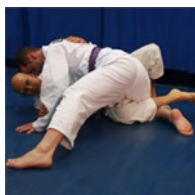
Here's a preview of the basic positions. We will examine each of these positions in considerable detail later in the book, as well as discussing why certain positions are NOT included in this categorization system.



1a: Closed Guard



1b: Open Guard



1c: Half Guard



2: Side Mount



3: Knee Mount



4: Mount (or Full Mount)



5: Rear Mount

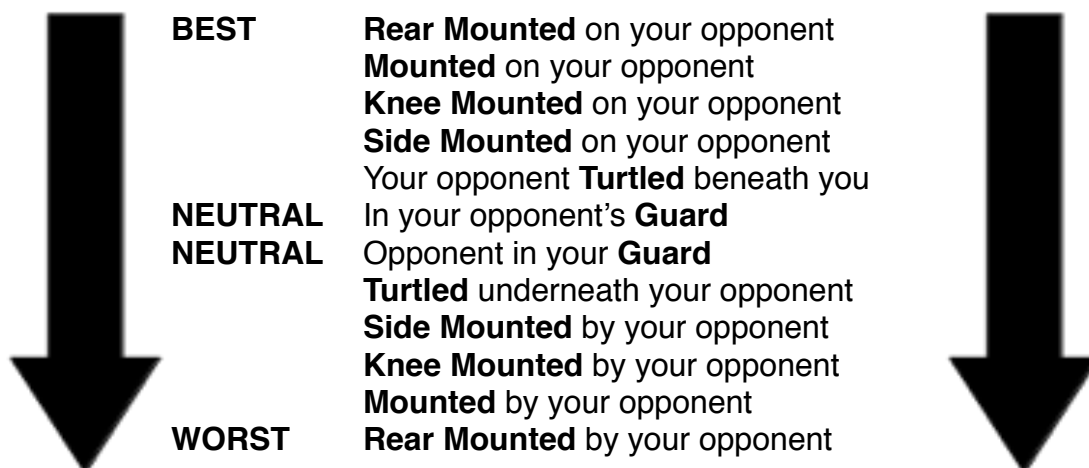


6: Turtle



A Positional Hierarchy

Central to BJJ strategy is the concept that **some positions are more advantageous than others**. Most BJJ instructors would probably place the 12 variations of the 6 positions into a hierarchy something like this:



As you can see from the diagram above, it's generally better to be on top than on bottom. **The only neutral bottom position is the Guard: if you're on the bottom in any position other than Guard you're losing!**

This ranking system is not cut and dried. Of course that there are exceptions, and certain practitioners can make some very unusual strategies work that completely defy conventional BJJ logic. These exceptional people tend to be advanced practitioners who are well grounded in the fundamental techniques and have now decided to branch out and experiment.

Start with the above positional hierarchy at first, and then become more creative as you get more experienced. However everyone wants to talk about exceptions, so let's tackle some of them head on now:

- Traditionally the **Half Guard** was regarded as a desperate and precarious position, one step away from having your Guard passed. With the advent of modern Half Guard techniques, many practitioners actually prefer this position and have turned it into a powerful sweeping and attacking position.
- Some MMA fighters, on the other hand, like it when their opponents are in **Half Guard**. They maintain that it is the best position from which to ground and pound an opponent. In the final analysis, whether the Half Guard is a good or bad position depends on the skills and attributes of the two combatants.
- A small number of competitors have developed the bottom **Turtle** position to such a degree that they use it to launch a number of attacks and reversals from that seemingly inferior position. They might even drop to their knees and go to Turtle right at the start of a BJJ or submission grappling match.
- Some BJJ practitioners don't like the **Full Mount**, feeling that the risk of ending up on the bottom (should the opponent reverse the position) outweighs the benefits. These grapplers often prefer the Side Mount, and their personal positional hierarchy would be different from the general one above.

This is far from a complete list of exceptions. Keep in mind though, that most World Champions base their game off of the positional hierarchy at the top of the page, and that the point system of sport BJJ also reflects this hierarchy. Relish and enjoy the exceptions - they keep life and martial arts interesting - but remember that what works for one particularly gifted player might not work for you.

Start with what I'm showing you, and then modify it to fit your own attributes, gifts, skills and goals.



What You Need To Learn

Here's what you need to learn in order to really start enjoying your rolling sessions:

- An ability to **recognize the 6 primary positions**. An example of this might be being able to say to yourself, "*I'm in Turtle and my opponent is now trying to get his hooks in and get to Rear Mount*" while sparring. It is empowering to understand what is going on, even if you can't do anything about it (yet!).
- A basic idea of **how to control an opponent in each of those positions**. You need to learn where to grip, how to position your legs, how to posture your body and how to use your weight to control your opponent. If you're on the bottom you need to know how to position yourself so that his weight isn't crushing you too badly and you're not giving him any obvious submission opportunities.
- At least **two transitions from each top position**. Every top position offers ways to transition to other positions. This might include methods to pass the Guard to get to Side Mount, or go from Knee Mount to Rear Mount.
- At least **two escapes or sweeps from each bottom position**. Should you find yourself pinned by your opponent, you'll need a couple of ways to get out of there. If you have your opponent in your Guard you need to have a few ideas of how to sweep him and get on top.
- At least **two submissions from each position**. The goal of Brazilian Jiu-jitsu is to submit your opponent. You don't initially need to learn every submission in the book, but knowing a couple of attacks from each position will really increase your enjoyment of this martial art.

The Premise and the Promise

Brazilian jiu-jitsu starts making sense and sparring becomes fun **when you have a couple of offensive and a couple of defensive options from each of the 6 major positions.**

Once you have learned these offensive and defensive options, then 80 to 90% of the time when you're sparring you'll actually have a clue of what is going on and what you might want to do next. **You will no longer be lost, and that is a wonderful feeling.**

Having a basic game plan for each position is your passport to enjoying live sparring, which is the most important training method of BJJ. I'm NOT promising you that your game plan will always work, because your opponent may know how to counter your specific techniques. That's OK though; it's all a normal part of the game.

Learning how to counter his counter (and counter his counter to the counter) keeps the game intellectually stimulating and is why **BJJ is a game of physical chess.**

The first step in navigation is always figuring out where you are. Once you know where you are then it's easy to decide what steps you need to take to get you to the correct destination!



Position before Submission

At its core, BJJ is a positional game. You often hear instructors tell their students that “*position comes before submission*”. This is a shorthand way of saying that you should try to get to a good position before going for a submission, that you shouldn't give up a good position to go for a dubious submission, and that a new student should first concentrate on learning good positional skills.

Putting position before submission is good advice, both when you're learning the art, and also when you're actually rolling around on the mats with someone. Learn the primary positions first, and then try to figure out which submissions work best from each position, rather than learning a whole bunch of cool submissions and then trying to figure out where and when to apply them.

It is true that there are a few chokes, armlocks and leglocks you can do from inferior bottom positions, but these aren't successful very often. The sad truth is that if you're in an inferior position then you have far fewer and (less effective) attacks available to you than does your opponent, so he will probably win the battle if you start trading submission attempts.

If you're in a bad position, first work on improving your position by getting to the top or at least by putting your opponent into the Guard. By doing this first you significantly reduce your opponent's submission options, and hugely increase the number of offensive options available to you.

On Keeping the Top Position

Keeping the top position is a contentious issue. To illustrate the debate, let's consider one of the classic BJJ techniques: the straight armbar from Mount. If you manage to pull it off and sink the armbar then that's great, the match is over. If your opponent manages to defend against the armbar, however, then you will typically end up on the bottom, in Guard. Going for that armbar means you run the risk of trading a superior position (Mount) for a neutral position (Guard). Some coaches will encourage you to try for that armbar and end the fight, while others will discourage it, arguing that risking top position is unacceptable.

As with all attempts to balance risk and reward, everyone has their own comfort zone. Some BJJ practitioners are perfectly happy to abandon top position if they think there is a chance that doing so could lead them to a successful submission, whereas more conservative grapplers prefer submissions that don't yield the top position should the attempt fail.

If you're competing in mixed martial arts (MMA), or are in a self-defense situation, then I would think long and hard before abandoning the precious top position. Being on the bottom in these contexts means that your opponent, with gravity on his side, could slip some heavy punches, elbows or headbutts through your defenses. But if you're doing sport BJJ or submission grappling, then being on the bottom isn't the end of the world if you have a good Guard game.

At some point in your BJJ career YOU'LL have to decide where you stand on the issue of keeping the top position. Even if you decide to become a die-hard top position player there are still several reasons why you should still learn and occasionally practice submissions with an inherent risk of you ending up on the bottom.

First, it may help your athletic development, and make you feel more comfortable in scrambles where positions aren't so clear cut and the role of the combatants (*i.e.* top vs. bottom) change very rapidly.

Second, an opponent may reverse you and send you to the bottom against your will - feeling comfortable with these techniques may allow you to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat *en route* to the bottom.

Finally, learning submissions that risk losing top position will improve your defense should an opponent try the same attack on you. **The best way to counter a technique is to first learn how to do it yourself.**



High-Percentage Submissions

Submissions make BJJ fun – everybody wants to know how to make an opponent tap out. It's normal, therefore, that most beginners want to get right to all those cool chokes, armlocks and leglocks. There is nothing wrong with learning a few submissions early on, so long as you recognize that it is the underlying positional game that allows you to set those submissions up and make them effective.

The grappling arts have hundreds of different chokes and joint locks that twist, bend and compress the body in a huge variety of ways. In reality, however, **most of what you actually see working between two equally skilled opponents is only a very small subset of all the possible submissions**. These are the 'high-percentage' submissions; chokes and joint locks that nearly everyone uses. If you're just starting out in BJJ, then pick a couple of these high-percentage submissions and learn how to apply them. At first it doesn't really matter which of those techniques you learn: just pick any two for each position and go from there. You'll learn the rest in short order (and in the meantime you'll have something to play with).

To illustrate this concept, let's consider the Closed Guard. This position offers the bottom man at least six high-percentage submissions commonly used in sparring and competition:

- the straight armbar
- the Kimura armlock
- the guillotine choke
- the triangle choke
- the omo plata armlock
- the cross-collar choke (if the top man is wearing a gi)

Initially you could choose to start by incorporating the straight armbar and the cross-collar choke into your game, but it would also be OK if you learned the guillotine choke and the Kimura armlock first.

Illegal Techniques

If you're just starting then it's important to recognize that not all submissions are legal in BJJ. Most BJJ schools, for example, don't allow beginners to do twisting leglocks and neck cranks, and none that I know of allow hair pulling, finger twisting or eye gouging in sparring. If you try these techniques on someone in your first class you will really upset people, so don't say I didn't try to warn you.

This is NOT to say that eye gouging and twisting leglocks don't work - on the contrary, they can be very effective ways to end a fight - but the dangers of including them in sparring far outweigh the benefits. Initially limiting jiu-jitsu practitioners to a smaller but relatively safe set of submissions allows you to do lots of sparring, and gives you the chance to try out your technique on someone who is really determined not to let you do it to them. If eye gouging was legal, then you couldn't train this way and we'd be back to doing two-person katas. Figuring out how to do an armbar on someone who is fully resisting allows you to get really good at the armbar AND at controlling an uncooperative opponent AND dealing with the stress of an almost-real fight.

Finally, consider that virtually all forbidden techniques (*e.g.* eye gouging, biting, hair pulling) are far more effective when applied from a dominant position. **If you are really determined to bite somebody, then get to Side Mount first and bite them from there.** If your only escapes from bad positions rely on so-called 'dirty' techniques then at least be aware that using them really raises the ante in any confrontation. If your one escape based on eye-gouging doesn't work immediately your opponent may start retaliating in kind and eye gouge you (or escalate the fight even further).

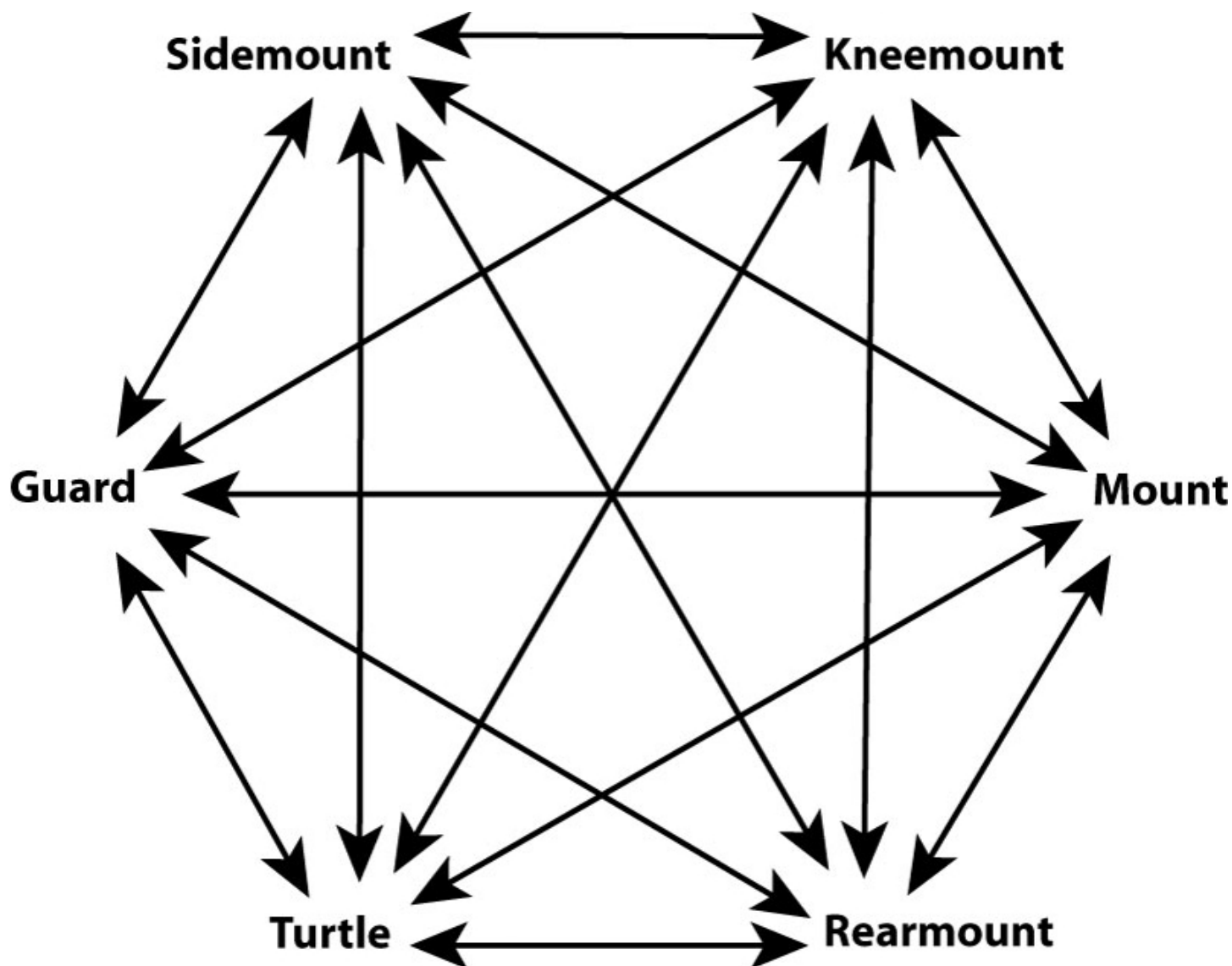
Whoever is in the dominant position will usually win the battle, whether the techniques used are 'clean' or 'dirty'.



A Roadmap for Grappling

Advanced BJJ practitioners often talk about the importance of 'flow', but what exactly is this quality? **Flow in BJJ is the transition from position to position.** Sometimes these transitions are formal techniques, other times they are unrehearsed and unplanned scrambles, but either way it is possible to transition from any primary position to any other position. If you're evenly matched with an opponent then it's impossible to predict what will happen: you can start in a certain position but end up in any of the other positions. Even advanced practitioners are sometimes amazed by the transitions that can occur in the heat of a match.

The diagram below attempts to convey the multitude of transitions that can occur in grappling. In truth the situation is even more complicated than this, because: a) each transition can be accomplished in different ways, b) each position has lots of variations, and c) this diagram ignores the fact that you could be on the top or bottom in each of the positions.



Do you initially need to learn every one of these transitions? Not at all! **If you try to learn everything at once then you'll actually retard your progress.** The saying that being a jack of all trades makes you master of none is very appropriate in this context.

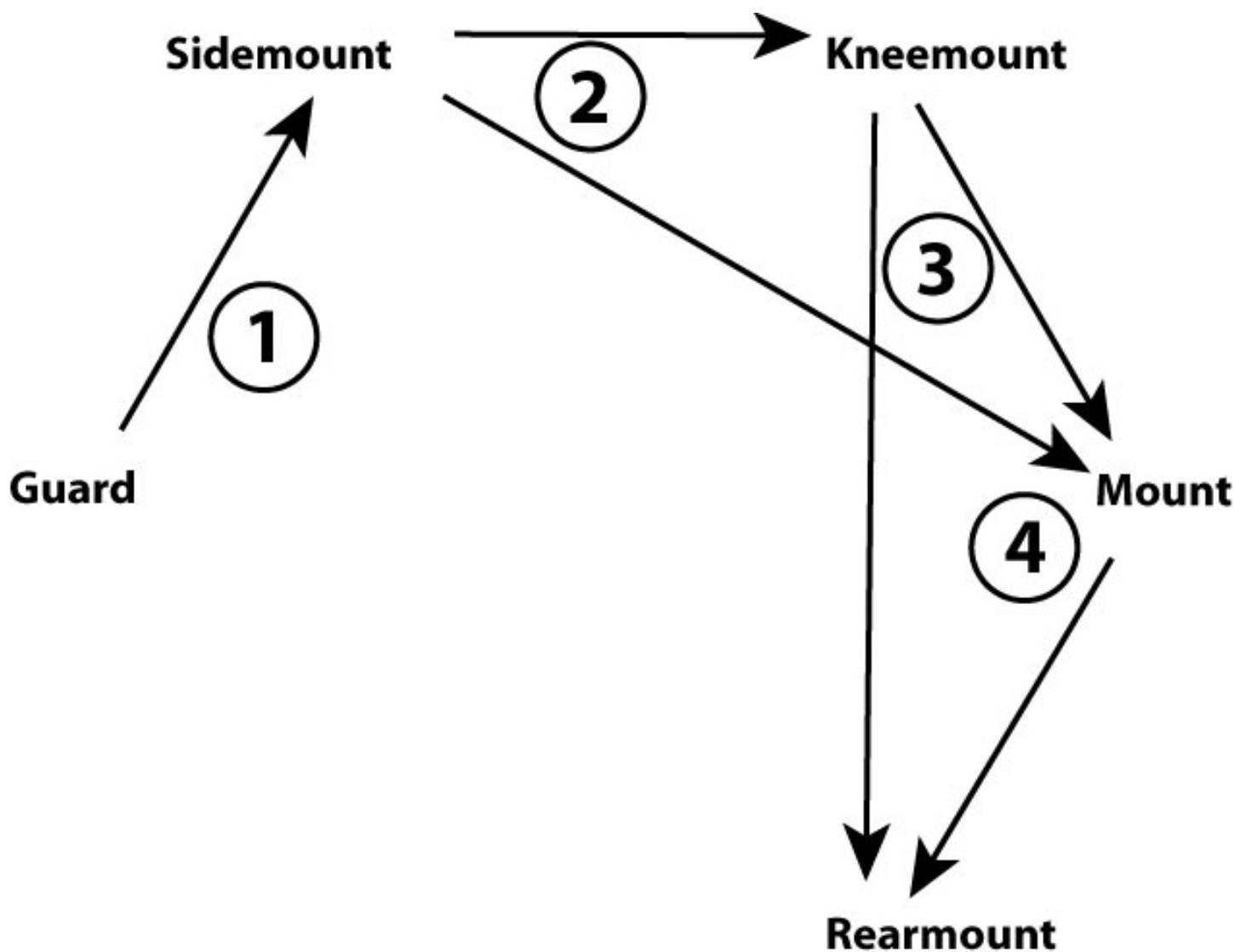
Fortunately BJJ has some very specific advice about which transitions you should learn first. **The transitions you should learn first are the techniques that move you up the positional hierarchy,** thus simultaneously improving your own position and putting your opponent into a worse position.



A Sample Offensive Strategy

A positional strategy doesn't include every possible transition from every position to every other position. Instead it prioritizes certain high value positions and transitions. **You always want to improve your position** (while simultaneously watching out for submission opportunities).

Below is a simple strategy that is instantly recognizable because it is the one used most of the time by a majority of BJJ players, regardless of whether they've been training for less than a year or are black belts competing in the World Championships. This strategy is very effective because each position is more dominant than the last. It is no coincidence that this is also the basic outline of the game plan used on the ground by many very successful MMA fighters.



Here is a step-by-step breakdown of what is going on in the above diagram:

1. If you find yourself in your opponent's **Guard**, try to pass it and get to **Side Mount**.
2. From **Side Mount** you have two options: go either to **Knee Mount** or **Mount**. Which option you choose may depend on your opponent's reactions and escape attempts.
3. From **Knee Mount** your opponent you may be able to get to **Mount** or to directly to **Rear Mount**.
4. From **Mount** you may be able to transition to **Rear Mount**.

Don't forget that submissions also play a role here: **at any point along the way you may get a chance to submit your opponent**, especially if he is completely focused on preventing your positional progression.



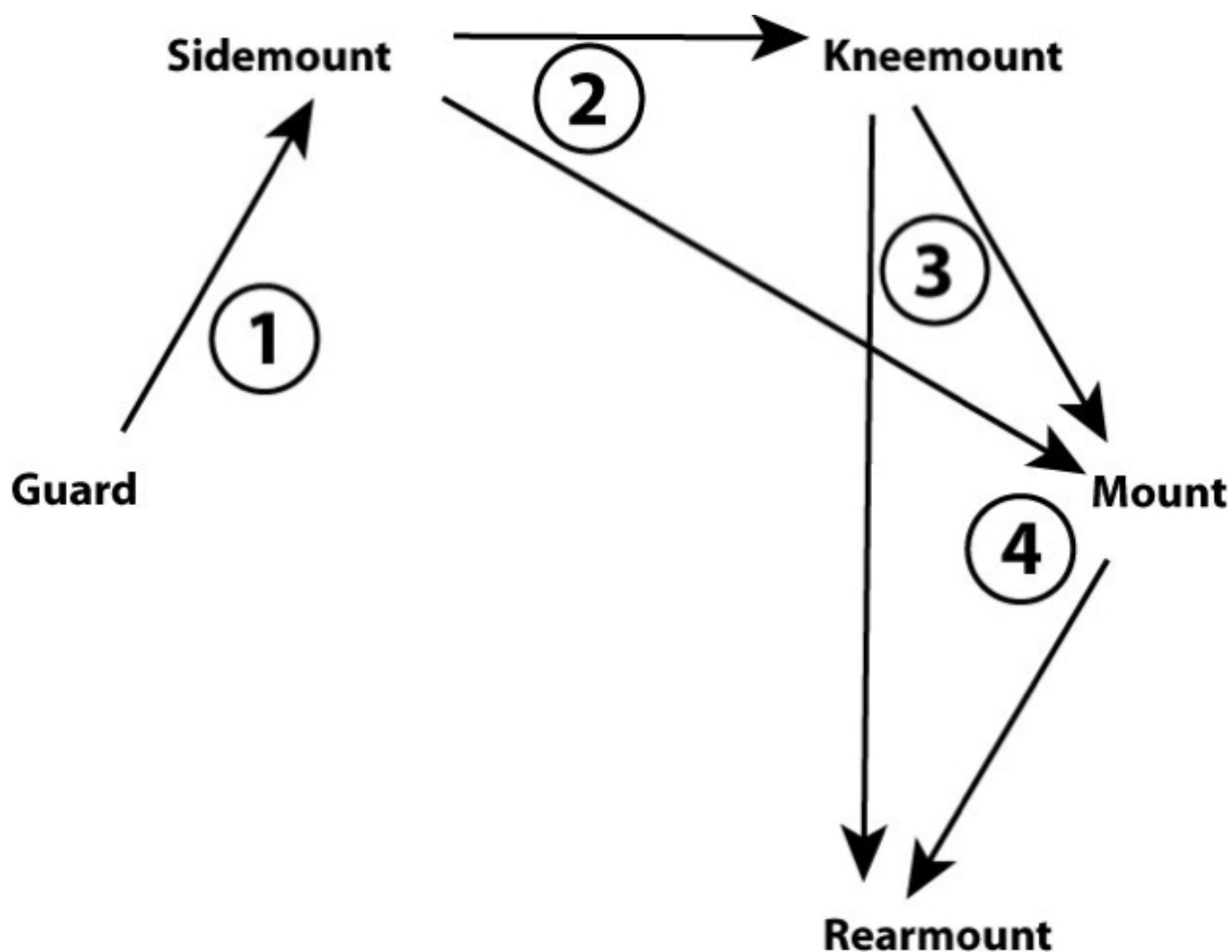
A Sample Defensive Strategy Map

It's a little harder to have one simple defensive strategy for when you are pinned in a bad position. The fact that you're on the bottom means that you are reacting to what your opponent is doing to you. You have lost control of the situation and are now in 'catch-up' mode.

Nevertheless it is still possible to have a plan. The strategy laid out as an example below has two parts:

1. From every bad position try either to get to **Guard**, or, failing that, to **Turtle**.
2. Use the **Turtle** as a transitional position. If you end up there then immediately try to get to **Guard** (Closed, Open or Half Guard).

It is important to emphasize that THIS IS NOT THE ONLY POSSIBLE STRATEGY - there are other ways to escape from bad positions. An alternative strategy, for example, would be to always try and get to Turtle and attack from there, trying to put your opponent on his back using wrestling-style takedowns. What I am showing you below is only one possible way to do things - in time your map will probably end up looking different from this one.



On 'Hooks'

In day-to-day life we don't do much with our legs. They hold us up when we stand, and they move us forwards when we walk. When you start Jiu-jitsu, however, you will start using your legs in ways you've never dreamed of before. They are an integral part of controlling and submitting your opponent.

When a leg or foot is used to control an opponent it is referred to as a 'hook'. When your opponent is Turtled and you 'get the hooks in' you have now moved into Rear Mount. Some forms of the Open Guard rely on having one or both feet on the opponent's biceps - these again are referred to as hooks. The struggle for placing, maintaining and removing hooks is an essential part of the game in both Brazilian Jiu-jitsu and no-gi submission grappling, akin to the vital importance of grip fighting in Judo or Wrestling.

On Hip Movement

It is a truism in BJJ that hip movement is the key to the art. Hip movement is what allows you to escape from pins, set up and apply submissions, pass the Guard, shut down sweeps, and so much more. You'll find that at least half the time when a technique just doesn't work your instructor will come over, sadly shake his head, and tell you to "move your hips". When you finally start doing this you will experience a HUGE leap in your abilities on the mat.

Proper hip movement comes with time and experience, but you can also develop it by drilling. The most fundamental (and arguably most important) drill for hip movement is a solo exercise called backwards shrimping. [Watch the first embedded video in this Grapplearts article to see an example of shrimping to develop hip movement](#) Once mastered, there are many more challenging variations of shrimping to further improve hip mobility on the ground.

But What About Other Positions?

Each of the 6 primary BJJ positions can be modified by changes of limb and body position, and it is important to learn a little bit about the most common variations. If, for example, a certain hand position in Side Mount completely nullifies your best escape technique then you'd better be aware of that before you waste all your energy by struggling ineffectively, and instead start thinking about the alternatives.

The boundaries of these positional variations are a bit vague, and some people might classify certain variations as separate positions. For example, some people might consider the North-South position to be sufficiently distinct from Side Mount to deserve its own category, as opposed to what I've done in this book (*i.e.* calling North-South position a variant of Side Mount). The terminology isn't too important; to quote Bruce Lee, "*...it's just a name, don't fuss over it.*"

There are also some positions that aren't really part of mainstream BJJ. An example of this might be the Headlock or Scarf Hold, which is common in Judo, Sambo and freestyle wrestling. I'm not saying that the Headlock isn't a good position, only that it isn't central to the BJJ way of doing things. **If you want to learn BJJ then you should first concentrate on the 6 primary positions.** Once you have these basics down and your roadmap filled in, THEN you can start worrying about, and diversifying your game to include, these other positions and/or invent new ones.

The bottom line is that no classification system is perfect. It doesn't matter if you're dealing with biology, economics, chemistry or grappling: sometimes the things you are trying to classify will absolutely refuse to be forced neatly into a convenient niche. To deal with this problem I encourage you to eventually create your own classification system, and use this system to describe the unique subset of positions, techniques and strategies that YOU use when YOU grapple.



The Closed Guard

The Closed Guard is one of three broad subdivisions of the Guard position, and is the starting point of the BJJ journey for many practitioners. Here you try to control your opponent with a variety of hand grips while using your legs to control your opponent's torso, moving him forwards and backwards, and side to side.

The first concern of the top player is to establish posture. If you are collapsed forward or otherwise out of balance you become susceptible to numerous attacks, and launching your own offense is very difficult.

If striking is allowed and you are on the bottom you want to keep your opponent close to you in order to limit the power of his strikes. If he breaks away and creates distance then you should switch to a long-range form of Open Guard. Keep him either near or far: it is in the middle range where most of the damage is usually inflicted. Another option used by quite a few MMA fighters is to stand up out of Closed Guard and get back to the feet using specialized standup techniques.



Top Transitions: Your main strategic goal in the top position here is to get past his legs and pin him. This is easier said than done; passing the Guard is one of the most difficult BJJ skills to master. In the case of the Closed Guard, passing is a three-stage process: 1) make posture, 2) open his legs and control his legs or hips, and then 3) pass over, under, or around his legs. Each of these three steps can be executed using either a standing or a kneeling position. A successful guard pass often results in the top person achieving Side Mount. It is not uncommon, however, to end up in Knee Mount or Full Mount instead, depending on techniques used and your opponent's reaction.

Bottom Transitions: "Guard sweeps" are techniques that you use on the bottom to flip or reverse your opponent, putting you in top position. Ideally a sweep gets you to a dominant pinning position, but sometimes your opponent may be able to establish Guard on you at some point during the process. This is still good for you though as you've now moved from bottom to top. Now get to work and pass the Guard!

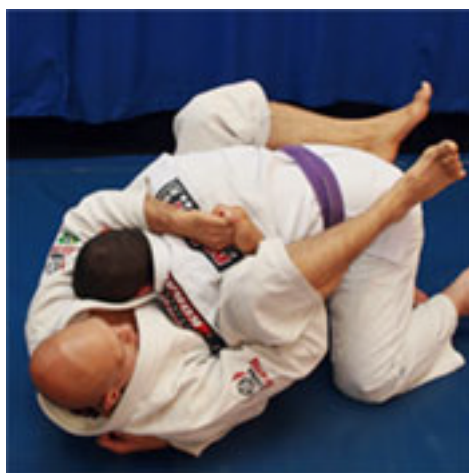
Standing up and getting to your feet is always an option in the Closed Guard, especially if you have decent standup skills. Another type of bottom transition occurs when you roll backwards over one shoulder to Turtle position to prevent a Guard pass. It's not a great place to be, but it's usually better than getting pinned.

Common Attacks: There are many submissions available to you from the bottom of Closed Guard. These include such attacks as the armbar, the Kimura, the triangle choke, the omo plata and the guillotine. If your opponent is wearing a gi you can also attack him with a variety of gi lapel chokes. Check out the [Grapplearts Submissions App](#) for a breakdown for these and other powerful submissions.

From the top of Closed Guard you have few submission options. Attempting to submit your opponent prior to passing his Guard is usually a mistake, although leglock attacks are a notable exception to this rule.



Here the bottom player controls his opponent's right arm with an overhook and his left arm by grabbing the wrist.



In the **Leghook Guard** the bottom man loops his arm under his own leg in order to keep his opponent's posture broken.



A competitor in a tournament is shown maintaining the **Closed Guard** even against a standing opponent.

Three Online Resources To Improve Your Closed Guard Game

- [A Glossary of Guards Part 1: The Closed Guard](#)
- [Guard and Bottom Position Gameplan App \(with a strong focus on the Closed Guard\)](#)
- [A step by step guide to shutting down your opponent's Closed Guard offense](#)



The Open Guard

The Open Guard encompasses a very wide range of Guard positions. The common denominator among the different forms of Open Guard is that your legs aren't closed around your opponent's torso. Control is achieved by pushing, pulling, and hooking his limbs and body with your feet. It is inherently a more dynamic, faster-paced position than the Closed Guard, and requires constant adjustments of leg and hip position by the bottom player.

In one of the most common versions of Open Guard (shown below) you keep one or both feet on your opponent's hips and control at least one of his arms. From here you can push him away, break his posture, and set up many different sweeps and submissions.

If you are the top player in someone's Open Guard you will constantly be working to remove or nullify his hooks and grips, establish posture, and pass his Guard.



Top Transitions: There are countless ways to pass Open Guard, but most methods involve first establishing posture, removing some or all of your opponent's hand grips and leg 'hooks', and then gaining control over his legs and hips. At this point you can use your weight to crush your opponent and pass slowly, or use your speed and pass fast: either way you get past his Guard to a more dominant top position.

Bottom Transitions: There are probably more sweeps and sweep variations from the Open Guard than in all other kinds of Guard combined - it's a very rich and diverse position. The placement of your hooks and grips, and your opponent's energy, will determine the type of sweep you end up using to flip or trip your opponent from the bottom. Your opponent can kneel, squat or stand in your Open Guard, so it is important to have attacks that work against each of these 3 types of posture.

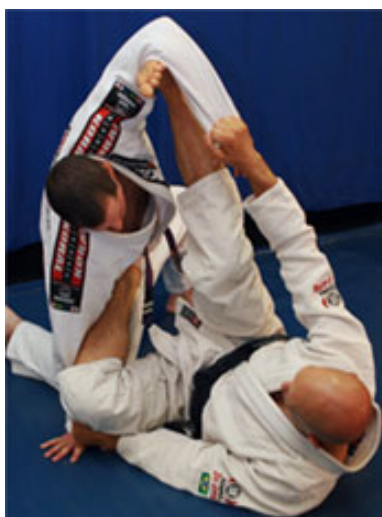
Some Open Guard sweeps can be difficult to learn at first, especially when each arm and leg is moving independently to accomplish its task. Don't worry! With proper repetition and targeted drilling of specific movements, these complex techniques will soon feel natural and you'll start doing them instinctively.

Common Attacks: Because of the diversity of the position, there are ways to apply almost every known submission from the Open Guard. Common upper body submissions include the armbar, triangle, guillotine, lapel chokes, Kimura and omo plata armlocks. These submissions are generally easiest to apply if your opponent stays on his knees; if he stands up then attacking the upper body becomes a little harder.

Footlocks and kneebars deserve special mention here, because they can be employed by both the top player and the bottom player. These are more common when the top player stands up (perhaps to defend his upper body). Once he stands up though, the gloves are off and now **both** people can go for leglock attacks.



In the **Butterfly Guard** you position your feet between your opponent's legs to disrupt his balance and sweep him.



The **Spider Guard** relies on having at least one foot on the bicep while controlling your opponent's wrists or sleeves.



Here two grapplers fight for wrist control while simultaneously jockeying for advantageous leg positions.

More Ways to Come to Grips with the Open Guard

- [A Glossary of Guards Part 2: The Open Guard](#)
- [The Most Powerful Sweeping Position in BJJ](#)
- [The highly reviewed Grapplearts Guard Sweeps App](#)



The Half Guard

The Half Guard is a position where your opponent is halfway past your Guard and you are controlling one of his legs with your legs. It was traditionally considered to be a very weak position in Brazilian Jiu-jitsu, but as the art evolved, new techniques and strategies were popularized that made the Half Guard a powerful position in its own right. When used offensively, the Half Guard allows you to get deep under your opponent's hips, disrupting his center of gravity, and putting him in constant danger from your sweeps and attacks.

In the Half Guard you can use either your outside or inside leg to control your opponent's leg, and you have to be able to switch positions in the Half Guard. The offensive Half Guard mostly relies on using the inside hook (shown below), maintaining an underhook with your top arm, keeping your body on its side and keeping your head and upper body from being controlled. Conversely, from the top Half Guard (sometimes referred to as 'Half Mount') you usually want to put your opponent flat on his back, nullify the underhook and establish control over his head and upper body.



Top Transitions: As with previous Guard positions, your main goal here is to pass the Guard, usually trying to get to Mount or Side Mount. In order to do this you need to understand your opponent's offensive options and know the counters; passing the Half Guard is tough if you're always getting swept or tapped.

The use of posture can proactively counter many of the dangers you face on the top, but posture in Half Guard can look quite different than in the other Guard positions. For example, one method of posture is to drive forward while controlling your opponent's head and far arm. Thus controlling your opponent you can now get to work on freeing your trapped leg and establishing a dominant top position.

Bottom Transitions: Three common types of transitions from the bottom are: 1) putting your opponent back into Closed or Open Guard, 2) sweeping him and getting to the top, and 3) taking his back to get to Rear Mount. If you are new to the Half Guard you should probably first concentrate on how to put your opponent back into the Guard, but with practice you will start to use all three options and learn how they work synergistically to create very powerful attacking combinations.

Common Attacks: Compared to the Closed or Open Guard, submissions aren't quite as common from the bottom of Half Guard. The two that you might see most frequently are Kimura armlocks and kneebars, although some practitioners also specialize in applying collar chokes and triangle chokes from this position.

If you are on top of someone in Half Guard then you have many submission options available to you, including straight and bent armlocks, chokes with and without the gi, and lots of leglocks. These submissions work best when mixed with attempts to pass the Half Guard. Guard passes can help set up submissions, and submissions can help set up Guard passes.



The **Half Butterfly Guard** combines the leg control of the Half Guard and the instep hook from Butterfly Guard. It can also transition into either position.



This variation is known as the **Deep Half Guard**, a form of Half Guard for more advanced grapplers.



The **X Guard** is another powerful hybrid, and could be classified as either an Open Guard or Half Guard position.

Three Links To Accelerate Your Half Guard Learning Process By 300%

- [A Glossary of Guards Part 3: The Half Guard](#)
- [Half Guard Leg Position Drill on Youtube](#)
- [The 100+ techniques, drills and principles that'll make the Half Guard your favourite position](#)



Side Mount

Side Mount, also known as the 'Hundred Kilos' position, is a very common pinning position in BJJ as it is a secure way to hold your opponent and offers many submission options. In Side Mount you control your opponent's upper body with your grips and your bodyweight. A variety of grips are used, but typically you will keep a hand or knee next to his hip to prevent him from easily putting you into Guard. Blocking the hips isn't as necessary if you rotate your body away from his legs and towards his head into a variation known as North-South position.

Many BJJ practitioners will try to further improve their position by going from Side Mount to the Full Mount, whereas others prefer to stay and hunt for submissions in Side Mount. Side Mount skills are absolutely essential in BJJ, regardless of whether it is your favorite position or just a brief stop on the road to the Mount. Much of your mat time will be spent here, so learning what to do - how to improve your position, how to attack from the top and defend from the bottom - are essential skills that every BJJ student needs to develop.



Top Transitions: A common progression from Side Mount is to go to Full Mount. Two straightforward ways to do this are: 1) swinging your leg over your opponent's body, or 2) first going to Knee Mount and then sliding your knee across to the other side. An alternative, used to open up a defensive opponent, is to go to Knee Mount and use the discomfort of that position to create openings for attacks. You can also transition to different variations of Side Mount by adjusting your leg and arm positions in response to his escape attempts.

Defensive Transitions: There are many techniques you can use to escape the bottom of Side Mount, the two most common being: 1) laterally moving your hips away from your opponent and then bringing your legs in between you and him to achieve Guard, or 2) turning onto your knees to get to the Turtle position and, from there, either establishing Guard or fighting for a takedown. Another option is using a bridging motion to roll an unwary and over-committed opponent over, getting to the top and then pinning him.

As with other techniques, your escapes are best used in combination. An isolated escape attempt may not work, but it can still serve to create an opening that you can then exploit with a different technique.

Common Attacks: There are actually a greater variety of submissions available to you from the top of Side Mount than in most other top positions. These include straight and bent armlocks, chokes with and without the gi, neck cranks, footlocks and kneebars. The most common attacks are the Americana (V-armlock), the Kimura (chicken wing armlock), the spin armbar and several chokes using your opponent's gi.

On the bottom you don't have very many high-percentage offensive options, but it is sometimes possible to submit and/or roll your opponent by attacking the arm closest to your head with a Kimura armlock.



This variation of Side Mount involves keeping both of your arms on the same side of the bottom man's body.



Here the top player has adjusted his arm position and circled his body towards his opponent's head, getting closer to what is known as **North-South** position.



Sometimes it is advantageous to change the position of your legs by 'switching your hips' into a **Modified Scarf Hold** position.

Check Out These Additional Side Mount Resources

- [How to Make Side Mount Heavier](#)
- [What Is Proper Posture When You're Trapped in Side Mount?](#)
- [The Most Important Thing You Can Do When Pinned in Side Mount](#)



Knee Mount

Knee Mount, also known as 'Knee on Belly', is a miserable position for your opponent because your whole weight is resting on him via your knee, which is painful and makes breathing difficult. Furthermore it offers the top person the strongest striking position in groundfighting. This position is therefore an excellent way to attack a very defensive opponent, because dealing with your knee often forces him to give you an opening for an attack, such as chokes and armbars. Knee Mount can also be used to temporarily secure a scrambling opponent, pinning him in place long enough for you to move to another position.

Depending on the circumstances you can place either your knee or shin on your opponent's belly, abdomen or solar plexus. Your other foot must float and be free to adjust to the movements of the pinned person. Most of your bodyweight must be borne by your opponent, and not by your feet. From the bottom your goals are to escape the position without exposing your arms to a jointlock or your neck to a choke.



Top Transitions: The most common transition from Knee Mount is to slide your knee across to the other side of your opponent's body and go to Full Mount.

Your center of gravity is relatively high in Knee Mount, which can reduce your stability somewhat, so you have to compensate by emphasizing mobility and adjusting to your opponent's reactions. It is fairly common, for example, for fighters to drop back down to the relative stability of Side Mount if they start feeling unstable in Knee Mount.

Bottom Transition: Most Knee Mount escapes require you to turn in and face your opponent, causing his knee to slide off your body onto the mat. If you are controlling his foot and leg during this motion you can even sometimes even topple him over and end up on top yourself. Another type of escape involves quickly pushing your opponent's knee down towards your legs and achieving Half Guard.

Sometimes your escape attempts will only result in your opponent adjusting his position and going to Mount or Side Mount. Be prepared for these movements, and plan on escaping DURING the transition, before he can fully stabilize his new position.

Common Attacks: The discomfort of being pinned in this position often leads the bottom person to use his arms to push your body and/or your pinning knee. This is a bad move, especially if done slowly: pushing separates the arms from the body enough to open them up to a variety of armlock attacks, like the near-side armbar, far-side spin armbar, and far-side Kimura armlock. Additionally, if your opponent's hands push on your pinning knee too long it exposes his neck to collar choke attacks.



Knee Mount can be executed using a variety of grips, including the lapel and knee grip shown here.



This variation does not require you to grip your opponent's gi, and is most often found in no-gi submission grappling.



The **Reverse Knee Mount** is usually used as part of a transition to other positions, or to counter escape attempts.

Make Your Opponent Suffer! More Resources For The Knee Mount

- [A Knee Mount Transition Drill \(and Other Mobility Drills\)](#)
- [Keeping The Will To Fight \(when things are going badly\)](#)
- [The Knee Mount In Action: Double Leg Takedown to Knee Mount](#)



The Mount

The Mount, also known as Full Mount, is the classic position of domination in Brazilian Jiu-jitsu. Although other martial arts such as Judo include this position in their repertoire, none have developed it to the same extent. In the Mount gravity is on your side. Your opponent is bearing your weight, and if you choose you can strike him with fists, elbows, hammerfists and palmstrikes. If you posture up in Mount you will be able to strike your opponent's face but he won't be able to reach yours.

In Mount, your weight rests on your opponent's belly and diaphragm, making it difficult for him to breathe. Your feet are tucked alongside, or slightly underneath, your opponent's thighs, and your knees are pinching inward to limit his mobility. If you are on top you should anticipate the most common methods of escape used by pinned opponents and be prepared to counter them. For example, untrained people often try to bench press their way out of the Mount predicament, which gives the top player a great opening for the armbar.



Offensive Transitions: The Mount is a good place to be, but you can improve your position even further by getting your opponent to give you his back and then taking Rear Mount. Turning your opponent like this can be done either with leverage-based grappling techniques, or by striking your opponent and forcing him to turn in order to protect his face. Other transition options include dismounting and returning either to Side Mount or Knee Mount, which can be used if you decide that you don't feel stable in Mount.

Defensive Transitions: To escape from the Mount most people initially learn two complimentary techniques: the 'upa' and the elbow-knee escape. To do the first escape - the upa - you trap your opponent's arm and a leg from the same side of his body, and then bridge up and towards those trapped limbs. Since he now can't use anything to stabilize the position he will tip over and you will up in his Guard.

The second bread-and-butter escape is the elbow-knee escape. In this technique you use limb placement and side-to-side hip movement (also known as 'shrinking') to place your opponent into Half Guard, and then use much the same motions on the other side to return to Closed Guard. This escape is often combined with the upa escape to form a strong combination.

Common Attacks: The two most commonly seen attacks from the Mount position are probably the straight armbar and variations of the cross-lapel choke (gi only), but the Americana (or V armlock), the head-and-arm choke, and the triangle are also popular and effective. These submissions work best when linked into combinations, so that your opponent's attempts to defend himself from one attack create an opening for another, making life on the bottom a difficult and dangerous place to be...

From the bottom you have very few submission options. The most frequent of those rare attacks is a footlock, which requires you to bridge and make some space, getting one knee between your bodies, and then applying the hold. It's not a high-percentage option - you are in a bad position after all - but it's worth having this arrow in your quiver to use as a last-ditch effort if nothing else is working.



In **Low Mount** you hook or entangle your opponent's legs to smother him and reduce the power of his bridge.



If your opponent turns his body to one side you can post one leg and slide the other knee up behind his head, going to **Technical** or **Triple Attack Mount**.



The **S-Mount** places a lot of pressure on the bottom man's diaphragm, making it hard for him to breathe and setting up a variety of armlock submissions.

Additional Resources To Fine Tune Your Mount Position

- [A Subtle Secret for Maintaining the Mount](#)
- [How to Escape the Mount of a Larger Grappler](#)
- [Stabilising Mount Even on a Bigger, Stronger Opponent](#)



Rear Mount

Rear Mount is considered by many to be the ultimate position in BJJ. You are on your opponent's back and controlling him with your hooks (ankles NOT crossed). He can't see what you're doing and you have great access to his neck. The Rear Mount is unique among BJJ positions because you are considered to be applying it regardless of whether you and your opponent are facing up to the ceiling or looking down to the floor. So long as you are on your opponent's back with both hooks in you are in the Rear Mount.

Once you are on your opponent's back he constantly has to defend against chokes. As proof of this position's effectiveness, consider the very large number of MMA matches that have been ended by a choke shortly after one of the combatants finally achieved Rear Mount. This is also a powerful position for self defense, but you have to weight the inherent advantages against the fact that disengaging from your opponent, should you need to do so, is a bit slower than breaking off contact from other dominant positions. Once in Rear Mount you are somewhat committed to it, so sink that fight-ending choke quickly!



Offensive Transitions: Once achieved, the Rear Mount is rarely abandoned. The position can be made even more dominant by flattening out your opponent (2nd variation below) or 'triangling' your legs around his torso if your legs are long enough to do so comfortably (3rd variation). If your opponent is close to escaping Rear Mount you can transition to Mount, Side Mount or Half Mount to maintain the top position.

Defensive Transitions: Escaping the Rear Mount is typically a multi-stage process. Defending your neck from chokes is priority one, and this relies heavily on fighting to control the gripping game. After that, if you are trapped face down (as in the first two photos below), then your next goal might simply be to turn and get your belly facing the sky. From there you may be able to escape your hips and shoulders laterally and get to Half Guard, or turn and face him so that you end up in his Closed Guard.

Generally speaking, any position is better than being trapped in Rear Mount. For example, if your escape attempt forces your opponent to abandon Rear Mount, but he now ends up pinning you 'only' in Side Mount, you can consider that a small victory (and then get to work escaping that position too).

Common Attacks: If you get Rear Mount on your opponent then you want to attack his neck, and one of the most powerful ways to do that is the rear naked choke (see www.youtube.com/watch?v=176SLdBhj_A for a detailed tutorial on this submission). You can also use many different lapel chokes to end the match. Some practitioners are very good at transitioning from the back to the straight armbar, but of course that involves the risk of losing the Rear Mount position altogether.

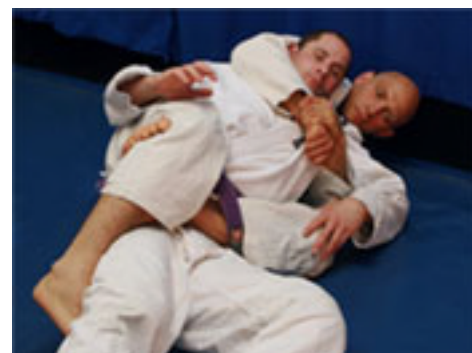
There aren't many offensive options available to you when someone is on your back. About the only feasible submission opportunity occurs if your opponent crosses his ankles in front of your body: now you might be able to footlock him if you cross your feet over his and bridge your hips forwards.



Here the top player has achieved Rear Mount by inserting his hooks on a Turtled opponent



By securing the upper body and driving your hips forward you can flatten out your opponent, making him very uncomfortable



Long-legged grapplers can 'triangle' their legs (placing their instep behind their own knee). This is another uncomfortable position for the trapped person

Three Links to Turbocharge your Rear Mount

- [A step-by step tutorial on how to apply the Rear Naked Choke \(aka the 'RNC'\)](#)
- [On Crossing Your Feet in Rear Mount](#)
- [An Example of Taking the Back during a Guard Pass](#)



The Turtle

The Turtle is generally NOT where you want to be - except if you're on top. If you end up on the bottom, for example after a failed takedown attempt, you are susceptible to getting choked, armlocked, and having your back taken, which gives your opponent Rear Mount. In MMA or in a self defense situation, going to the Turtle will generally result in you receiving a lot of punches to the head, knees to the body, and quite possibly soccer kicks to the face. Not good!

Despite these limitations, being in Turtle is usually still better than being pinned, and so quite a few escape techniques will pass through this position. From Turtle, make sure you defend yourself, but also try to keep the situation dynamic. Do not allow your opponent stabilize his position and settle his weight on you; instead try to get to another position like the Guard. On the other hand, if you're the one on top of a Turtled opponent, then stay connected to him and make sure he's bearing your weight - this will tire him out, and create openings for your attacks.



Top Transitions: Basic jiu-jitsu strategy dictates that you first stabilize the top position and then work towards getting your hooks in to achieve Rear Mount. If you can't do this, or you don't feel comfortable in Rear Mount, then there are many other techniques you can use to turn your opponent onto his back and control him in a different pinning position.

Bottom Transitions: On the bottom your options strongly depend on the exact orientation of you to your opponent, how he is gripping you and where his weight is. You can try to put your opponent back into the Guard, either by turning towards him or by doing more complex rolls and maneuvers. Alternatively you can grab one or both of his legs and try a wrestling-style takedown, or you can roll him over your body if he over-commits himself. Sometimes you can surprise him from the bottom Turtle position and take HIS back, which is definitely an unexpected move. Finally you can also fight your way back to your feet, face him and start the battle anew.

Common Attacks: Although it is most common to get to Rear Mount before attempting a submission, it is also possible to submit a Turtled opponent without taking his back first. Some of the most common submissions used against the Turtle include the 'clock choke' (gi only), the anaconda choke, straight armlocks, omo platos and reverse omo platos. These armlocks often involve first using your legs to trap his near arm and take it away from the relative safety of being close to his body.

Even if you are on the bottom of Turtle you still have a few submission options available to you, including rolling kneebars and Kimura armlocks. Submission attacks from the bottom are most effective when combined with attempts to put your opponent into the Guard and/or reverse him (using the bottom transitions discussed above).



The top player has moved to the side of his opponent and grips around the upper body. His left knee is on the ground and his right foot bases out for balance.



Keeping the same upper body grip, the top player now has his other knee on the ground and is using his left foot to create an opening for inserting his hooks



Here he has moved to a head-to-head position with his legs sprawled back, and is using his weight to pin the bottom man.

A Masterclass on Strategies and Tactics for the Turtle Position

- [The Rolling Kneebar from Turtle \(and Two Other Kneebar Attacks\) in Comic Book Format](#)
- [How to Overcome Claustrophobia In BJJ](#)
- [How to Stop Your Opponent from Turtling During the Guard Pass](#)



Sample Technique List

This list is provided as an example of the techniques that might be employed by a beginning-to-intermediate level student of BJJ. This is **not a definitive or exhaustive list of techniques** - BJJ is too rich and diverse an art for that. Instead these are just **some** of the fundamental, yet highly effective, techniques you will discover on your grappling journey. If your school already has a curriculum then try to figure out where those techniques fit into this categorization system.

Similarly, **you don't need to learn every single technique here before you start enjoying BJJ**. Start by picking just one or two from each category and go from there. The goal is for you to eventually assemble your own personalized list of reliable techniques, drawn from the resources available to you (your instructor, fellow students, the internet, books, DVDs, etc), and build a game that is tailored to fit your own gifts, attributes and goals.

Some Common Closed Guard Techniques

Submissions	Top Transitions (Guard passes)	Bottom Transitions (sweeps)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 5 step armbar ○ Swinging armbar ○ Triangle choke ○ Kimura armlock ○ Guillotine choke ○ Omo plata armlock ○ Ankle lock (top) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Guard break & same side knee slide ○ Guard break & cross knee slide ○ Standing guard break & leg toss 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Hip bump sweep ○ Scissor sweep ○ Flower sweep ○ Omo plata sweep

Some Common Open Guard Techniques

Submissions	Top Transitions (Guard passes)	Bottom Transitions (sweeps, etc.)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Triangle choke ○ Armbar ○ Various foot locks (top & bottom) ○ Kneebar (top & bottom) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Leg toss, go to Knee Mount ○ Roll opponent to turtle, take back 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Heel grab sweep ○ Balloon sweep ○ Tripod sweep ○ Tomahawk sweep ○ Butterfly sweep ○ Kick away and stand back to feet

Some Common Half Guard Techniques

Submissions	Top Transitions (Guard passes)	Bottom Transitions (sweeps)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Kimura (top & bottom) ○ Kneebar (top & bottom) ○ Sleeve choke from top (gi only) ○ Various footlocks (top) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Control upper body, pry legs with instep, go to Mount ○ Control lower body, sprawl & pass, go to Side Mount 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Hook with outside leg & reguard ○ Insert butterfly hook, lift & reguard ○ Foot grab sweep



Some Common Knee Mount Techniques

Submissions	Top Transitions (positional improvements)	Bottom Transitions (escapes and reversals)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Kimura (aka hammerlock) ○ Far side spin armbar ○ Cross collar choke (gi only) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Switch to Knee Mount on the other side ○ Slide knee to Mount ○ Drop down to Side Mount 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Escape hips, force him to Side Mount ○ Push leg down to Half Guard ○ Transition to a low single leg

Some Common Mount Techniques

Submissions	Top Transitions (positional improvements)	Bottom Transitions (escapes and reversals)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Floating (hands on chest)armbar ○ Cross collar choke (gi only) ○ Americana (aka V-armlock) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Cross his arm & take the back ○ Dismount to Knee Mount 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Upa (trap arm and leg and then bridge) ○ Elbow-knee escape

Some Common Rear Mount Techniques

Submissions	Top Transitions (positional improvements)	Bottom Transitions (escapes and reversals)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Rear naked choke (aka RNC) ○ Sliding collar choke ○ Straight armbar 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Move legs achieve a figure 4 bodylock ○ Return to the Mounted position 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Cross his arm & turn to face him in his Guard ○ Lateral slide to Half Guard

Some Common Turtle Techniques

Submissions	Top Transitions (positional improvements)	Bottom Transitions (escapes and reversals)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Clock choke (gi only) ○ Straight armlock with legs ○ Rolling kneebar (from bottom) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Insert hooks & get Rear Mount ○ Turn him over, secure Side Mount 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Turn in & reguard ○ Turn out & rolling reguard (Granby Roll) ○ Sit out & take back ○ Trap arm and roll opponent



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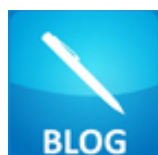
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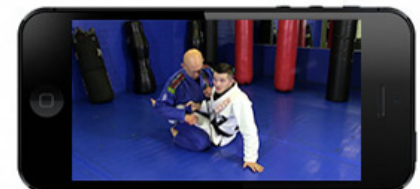
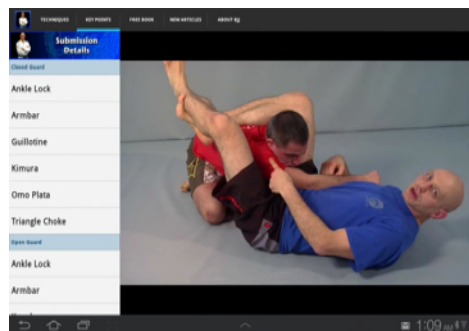
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