

# Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu

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**Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu (BJJ)** is a [martial art](#) and [combat sport](#) that emphasizes [ground grappling](#), with free [sparring](#) being an important training method. The aim is generally to use a variety of [grappling holds](#) to advance in [positioning](#), and to finally obtain a [submission hold](#). Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu is usually practiced in a [gi](#) very similar or identical to a [judogi](#), but non-gi training is also part of the training regimen in many BJJ schools, and is sometimes referred to as '[submission wrestling](#)'.

The term **Gracie Jiu-Jitsu (GJJ)** is sometimes used interchangeably with Brazilian "jiu-jitsu", but is trademarked by [Rorion Gracie](#), and specifically refers to the style of Brazilian jiu-jitsu taught by him and other selected teachers.

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## General

Brazilian jiu-jitsu is an orthogonal development of pre-1925 Kodokan Judo (known then as ju-jitsu). It arrived in [Brazil](#) when [Mitsuyo Maeda](#) first introduced it during his visit to Brazil with the hopes of establishing a Japanese colony/community in the country. It was further developed by the Gracie family during the mid-[20th century](#). The most important difference of Brazillian jiu-jitsu compared to [Judo](#) and Japanese [Jujitsu](#) is that BJJ is much more focused on [ground fighting](#) than their eastern counterparts. While Japanese Jujitsu and Judo does have extensive training in ground fighting (newaza), with some schools favoring ground techniques over throwing, no Japanese school put so much emphasis on ground techniques as is done in BJJ. Some (if not the majority of) BJJ schools reach a point of overlooking throwing techniques entirely. Such training regime is

responsible for the great advances in ground fighting introduced by Brazilian jiu-jitsu. In addition, like Judo, Brazilian jiu-jitsu encourages "[randori](#)" or free sparring against a live, resisting opponent. Thus, students have an opportunity to test their skills and develop them under realistic conditions, with minimal risk of injury.

Overall, although most if not all Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu techniques can be traced back to Judo and their predecessors, the major difference is that BJJ stresses the importance of gaining a dominant position over an opponent before attempting a submission; most BJJ schools teach "position before submission".

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## History

A [Japanese judoka](#), prizefighter, and former member of the [Kodokan](#) named [Mitsuyo Maeda](#) emigrated to Brazil in the [1910s](#) where a local influential [businessman](#) named Gastão Gracie helped him get established. In return for his aid, Maeda taught Judo to Gastão's son Carlos, who then taught the art to his brothers, including [Hélio Gracie](#). Through their own study and development, Carlos and Hélio are regarded as the originators of Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu as a style distinct from Judo.

Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu became internationally prominent in the martial arts community in the [1990s](#), when Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu expert [Royce Gracie](#) won several [single elimination](#) martial arts tournaments called [Ultimate Fighting Championships](#) against sometimes much larger opponents who were practicing other styles.

Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu inherited its emphasis on using [leveraged](#) counterpoise, and the opponent's own weight, as well as a majority of its technique from Kodokan [Judo](#). However, there has been considerable divergence since that time as Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu evolved. Some argue that the differences are more in culture and moral goals than in the physical principles and techniques of the two arts.

The main difference is that Judo, especially in its [Olympic sport](#) form, emphasizes throws, while Jiu-Jitsu emphasizes submission of the opponent using joint locks or chokes. Judo has a much higher amount of referee intervention; in Judo matches, the competitors are often returned to the standing position, while in Jiu-Jitsu matches, the participants are generally allowed to remain on the ground while working for a submission.

Contributing factors to the divergence include the Gracies' desire to create a national martial art, the influence of Brazilian culture, the non-participation of the Gracie schools in sport judo, the post [World War II](#) closing of the [Kodokan](#) by the American Occupation Authority (which were only allowed to reopen on the condition that emphasis be shifted towards sport), as well as the Gracies' own additions to the body of technique and opinions regarding [self-defense](#), martial arts and training methods; and, more recently, the influence of mixed-martial-art competitions such as the Ultimate Fighting Championship.

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## Techniques

Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu emphasizes [ground fighting](#) techniques and [submission holds](#) involving [joint-locks](#) and [chokeholds](#). The premise is that most of the advantage of a larger, stronger opponent comes from superior reach and more powerful strikes, both of which are largely negated if wrestling on the ground. BJJ includes many techniques to [throw](#) or tackle opponents to the ground, these are notoriously difficult to resist even for people who are trained in their countermeasures. Once the opponent is on the ground, a number of maneuvers (and counter-maneuvers) are available to manipulate the opponent into suitable position for the application of a submission hold. This system of maneuvering and manipulation can be likened to a form of kinetic chess when utilized by two experienced practitioners. A submission hold is the equivalent of checkmate.

Submission holds can be grouped into two broad categories: [joint locks](#) and [chokes](#). Joint locks typically involve isolating an opponent's limb and creating a lever with your own body position which will force the joint to move past its normal range of motion. Pressure is increased in a controlled manner and if the opponent cannot escape the hold then they may signal defeat by submitting. The commonly accepted form of submission is to tap the opponent, gym mat, or even yourself, three times. Verbal submission is also acceptable but less common.

Alternatively, one could apply a choke hold, disrupting the blood supply to the [brain](#), causing unconsciousness if the opponent refuses to tap out.

Most BJJ "chokes" involve constriction of the [carotid artery](#) (causing [hypoxia](#)). This differs from the more instinctive choking movements which generally involve constriction of the [windpipe](#) (causing [asphyxia](#)). Though this distinction may at first seem subtle it is in fact significant (commonly referred to as "blood" and "air" chokes respectively). Air chokes are highly inefficient and may result in damage to the opponent's [trachea](#), sometimes even resulting in death. In contrast, blood chokes directly cut the flow of blood off to the opponent's brain causing a rapid shutdown of consciousness without damaging the internal structure. Being "choked-out" in this way is actually relatively safe as long as the choke is released soon after unconsciousness, letting

blood (and therefore [oxygen](#)) back into the brain before the damages of [oxygen deprivation](#) begin.

The prevalence of the dangerous "air" chokes has actually led to the banning of chokeholds from some United States police departments. Because of the negative legal connotations of the words choke and even strangulation one is advised to use the term "lateral vascular restraint" when describing a blood choke used in a self-defense situation.

Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu's emphasis on joint locks and maneuvering rather than [strikes](#) means that one's technique can be practiced at full speed and almost full power, resembling the effort and technique used in a real fight. Training partners can resist and counter just as they would in an actual fight, providing valuable real-world experience should the techniques ever need to be applied in an actual fight. This practice of live training, officially called Randori but commonly known as "rolling" in BJJ circles, is considered by many BJJ practitioners to be the major factor differentiating combat sports (ex. BJJ, Judo, [Boxing](#), [Wrestling](#)) from traditional martial arts (ex. [Karate](#), [Tae Kwon Do](#), [Aikido](#)).

While many joint locks are permitted, most competitions bar or restrict joint locks involving the knees, ankles and spinal column. The reasoning behind this being that the angles of manipulation required to cause pain are nearly the same to cause serious damage. Joint locks that require a twisting motion of the knee (called twisting knee locks or twisting knee bars) are almost universally banned in competitions as successfully completing the move nearly always results in permanent damage that requires surgery in order to walk again. Similarly, [joint manipulations of the spine](#) are typically barred due to the inherent danger of death or paralysis from crushing or mis-aligning [cervical vertebrae](#). In Brazil, locks involving the knees and ankles are only allowed in competition starting at the brown belt. Any competitor from white to purple belt who tries any of these locks will be disqualified.

However, most joint locks involving the wrist, elbow or shoulder are permitted as there is a great deal more flexibility in those joints and are very safe to use under tournament conditions. Finger locks are sometimes permitted but are generally frowned upon because a broken finger would not disable an attacker, thus preventing the fighter from definitively proving superiority. Also, in lower levels of competition, some fighters will practice moves whose sole purpose is to inflict pain upon their opponent, in the hopes that they will tap out. This includes driving knuckles into [pressure points](#), holding their opponent's head in order to tire out the neck (called the "can opener" or kubi-hishigi) and putting body weight on top of the [sternum](#), [floating ribs](#), or similarly sensitive bones. These moves are not true submission moves and are avoided or brutally countered in middle to upper levels of competition. Generally, they are used as distractions, although an unexperienced fighter may tap out, despite being in no real danger.

In modern times, many forms of sport fighting have come into vogue. During competition, these styles award points for attacking with certain techniques. For example, a competitor may be awarded 2 points for kicking his or her opponent in the body and 3 points for kicks delivered to the head. Coinciding with Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu's considerable surge in popularity, many tournaments now disallow striking in favor of grappling. The rules for these contests reward points to a competitor that has obtained a position considered to be advantageous. In the event that no combatant was submitted outright, the winner will be determined by these points.

The main emphasis in Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu is to dominate the opponent through skillful application of technique and force them to quit (submit). By using the techniques of Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu, a smaller practitioner, male or female, can control much larger and stronger opponents and actually force the larger opponent to submit.

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## Grading

One of the things that separates Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu from other martial arts is the importance of competition. Sparring is considered essential to a student's progression. This is a "live" martial art where one can go 100% in training without fear of injuring his or her opponent. Many say that this constant training against live, fully resisting opponents sets it apart from other traditional martial arts.

Initially, students are concerned with getting their blue belt, as it is the first sign of achievement. For some the blue belt can take as little as one month, for others it can take up to 4 years to achieve. From Blue Belt typically Purple belt can take from 2-6 years (considered by many the hardest transition), Purple to Brown 1-4 years and Brown to Black is usually the quickest transition, anywhere from 0-3 years. On average it takes 8-15 years to achieve Black Belt in Brazilian Jiu Jitsu with the fastest being 4 years (Lloyd Irvin, [B.J. Penn](#), many Gracie family members, et al).

Each belt becomes progressively more difficult to get because the level of fluidity and technical knowledge demanded increases. Brazilian Jiu Jitsu promotes hard work being the key to advancement. This is not a sport where time spent training will yield a certain belt, but where quality time is essential.

The standards for grading and belt promotions vary between schools, but the widely accepted measures of a person's skill and rank in Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu are (1) the amount of technical knowledge they can demonstrate on the mat, and (2) their performance in competition.

Technical knowledge is judged by the number of techniques a person can perform, and the level of skill with which he performs them. This allows for smaller and older people to be recognized for their knowledge though they may not be the biggest and strongest fighters in the school. It is a distinctly individual sport, and practitioners are encouraged to adapt the techniques to make them work for their body type, strategy, and level of athleticism. The ultimate criterion is the ability to execute the technique successfully, and not stylistic compliance.

Competitions play an important role in the grading of Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu, as they allow an instructor to compare the level of his students against those of the same rank in other schools. A belt promotion may be given after success in a competition, particularly at the lower belts. A promotion might also be awarded when a person can submit most people in his school of the same rank, e.g. a white belt who consistently submits most other white belts in sparring.

The high level of competition between schools and its importance to belt promotion is also considered to be one of the key factors preventing instructors from lowering standards or allowing people to buy their way up the belts.

Many instructors also take the personality of the person and their behavior outside of class into account, and may refuse to promote someone if they exhibit antisocial or destructive tendencies.

It is by these and other criteria that most instructors promote their students. A few schools may also have formal testing, and include oral or written exams.

### **Children's belts (15 and under)**

White

Yellow

Orange

Green

### **Adults belts (16 and over)**

White

Blue

Purple

Brown

Black

The green and yellow belt is worn only during competition by one competitor for scoring purposes and is usually worn over their normal belt.

There is a minimum age requirement for belt promotions. Blue belts are never awarded to anyone under the age of 16. For promotion to black belt the minimum age is 18 years old or older according to the regulating body of Brazilian Jiu Jitsu: the "Confederação Brasileira de Jiu-Jitsu" and "International Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu Federation", or CBJJ and IBJJF respectively.

Stripes, like the belts themselves, tend to be awarded at the instructor's discretion, and may be in recognition of accomplishments like noticeably improving or tournament victories. However, not all schools award stripes, or award them consistently, so the number of stripes a person has is not necessarily a good measure of their accomplishments or time in training.

[Black belts](#) receive degrees every three years for as long as they train. At 8th degree, the black belt is replaced by an alternately red and black belt. The solid red belt is for 9th and 10th degree. The 10th degree is reserved for the art's founder Carlos Gracie Sr and his brothers, Hélio Gracie, Gastão Gracie Jr, Jorge Gracie and Oswaldo Gracie and cannot be achieved through normal rank progression. Gracie family members who are 9th degrees belt holders are Carlson Gracie, Reylson Gracie and Rorion Gracie who was promoted on October 27th 2003 by his father Helio Gracie.

Only black belt instructors can promote up to black belt level. Affiliate schools without a black belt instructor allow lower belt instructors to promote, with permission from their black belt instructor, their students to one rank below their own, e.g. a brown belt can promote his students as high as purple but no further.

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## External links

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## History

[BJJ.ORG - Gracie Brazilian Jiu Jitsu](#)

[A judoka reports on Brazilian jiu jitsu in 1960](#)

[The Gracie Way: An Illustrated History of the World's Greatest Martial Arts Family](#)

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## Techniques

[David Thomas' Austin Jiu-Jitsu BJJ Technique Catalog](#)

[MMAlibrary.com - Lots of techniques from Brazilian Jiu Jitsu](#)

[Large collection of MMA techniques](#)

[Subfighter.com Online Video Jiu Jitsu And MMA Techniques](#)

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## School Directories

[Jiu-jitsu.net: Search for Schools](#)

[Challenger Martial Arts School Locator](#)

[Lockflow.com: Jiu-jitsu, MMA, and other martial arts school directory](#)

[FightResource.com: MMA, Jiu-jitsu, and other martial arts school directory](#)

[GrappleArts: Grappling School Directory](#)

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## **Misc**

[The FightWorks Podcast: Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu and Mixed Martial Arts Internet Radio](#)

[Subfighter.com Online Brazilian Jiu Jitsu Video Techniques](#)

[On The Mat](#)

[Alexandre "SOCA"](#)

[Jiu Jitsu Gear Forum](#) Brazilian Jiu Jitsu Discussion Forum

[Antonio "Nino/Elvis" Schembri](#)

[Stephan Kesting](#)

[Henry Matamoros](#)

[Got Jits?](#) Perspectives from a Brazilian Jiu Jitsu White Belt

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