

STREET CHUCKS

NUNCHAKU FOR SELF-DEFENSE



PHIL ELMORE

Phil Elmore

Street Chucks: Nunchaku for Self-Defense
By Phil Elmore

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Street Chucks: Nunchaku for Self-Defense

For My Wife

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“It was tragic when Bruce Lee died. It actually put a lot of burden on me, to be honest. It was a lot of pressure to be the best nunchaku practitioner in the world. Young upstarts still challenge me from time to time, trying to see if they can take the king of the hill down a few notches. When will they ever learn...”

— Scott Roeben

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“You know, like nunchuck skills, bowhunting skills, computer hacking skills... Girls only want boyfriends who have great skills.”

— Jon Heder, *Napoleon Dynamite*

SPECIAL THANKS

Years ago, I purchased my very first book on martial arts weaponry. That book was Ted Gambordella's *The Complete Book of Karate Weapons*. I was fresh from a semester of Karate in college and knew absolutely nothing. Using that book and two pairs of foam training nunchaku, I successfully taught myself the basics of this versatile and effective weapon. I've learned a lot since then and discarded much of what I picked up along the way, but the book that started me on the path was Gambordella's. I don't know him; I don't know anything about him. I would, however, like to thank him. Somewhere in the world there's another chubby kid with a yellow belt and a pair of foam 'chucks, flailing himself accidentally in the groin, who might go on years later to accomplish his dream of successfully publishing self-defense textbooks. In my case, the fulfillment of that dream is arguably attributable to many people, but one of them has to be some guy named Ted Gambordella. Thank you, Ted, whomever and wherever you are.

Much more recently, I discussed nunchaku and technique with my Liu Seong Gung Fu teacher, Sifu Guro Dan Donzella. Sifu Dan has taught me a great deal and shown me just what a truly great teacher can do and be. Thank you, Sifu Dan. (No endorsement of the contents of this booklet on Sifu Dan's part is implied or should be inferred, however. Any mistakes are my own.)

I would also like to extend my best wishes to the readers of *The Martialist* e-zine and the members of *The Martialist's* forum. My thanks, my apologies, and my hopes to you all.

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“So, this is your day, Bruce. I will dust off my nunchakus in your memory. The broken lamps and crystal will be my way of remembering your brilliance. I would like to have known you, but I was just a kid. Your candle burned out long before your legend ever did.”

— Scott Roeben

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INTRODUCTION

As a young boy and aspiring writer concerning the martial arts, I spent a long time trying to figure out how to spell those noises Bruce Lee makes in the movies, especially when he's wielding nunchaku. The closest I could get was, "Bwoooooaaah," which is either a Bruce Lee noise or a foghorn, depending on the cadence and pitch with which you read it aloud.

Most of us familiar at all with the martial arts, or simply with popular culture since the 1970s, are familiar with the *nunchaku*. These traditional Eastern martial arts weapons — descendents of agricultural flails, according to traditional (and often traditionally wrong) sources, lore that is perhaps more mythology than fact — were probably popularized in recent memory by the late Bruce Lee, who gave us indelible and iconic imagery of the lone and often shirtless warrior swinging the nunchaku furiously about the body in a display that... well, doesn't really accomplish anything.

The nunchaku in its various incarnations has been, rightly or wrongly, associated with Asian martial arts. Other cultures have appropriated it and some have since discarded it. It is not the most popular of martial arts weaponry as I write this, though it is an old standby. The association with the Eastern, with the exotic, has hurt the nunchaku. It has hurt its standing both in contemporary society and with regard to its popularity in martial arts circles.

Most martial arts weapons have been legislated into illegality to some degree. Lawmakers delight in banning anything they do not understand. Often they pass laws identifying such weaponry with inaccurate and completely silly terminology. The New York State Penal Code makes

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no mention of nunchaku, but it does ban the possession of “Kung Fu stars” and the deadly “chuka stick.” Take a look through your state’s penal code sometime and you’ll see language that will make you laugh out loud. One of my favorites is Kentucky’s penal code, which as of this writing outlaws, among other deadly martial arts implements, the possession of a “shuriken or death star.” I can see why this would be. There is no legitimate sporting purpose for a space station the size of a small moon that is capable of destroying an entire planet. Besides, it’s hell finding a shoulder holster to fit the thing.

Weapons that can in any way be considered exotic or that appear frightening to the uninitiated are frequent targets. It is therefore sadly the case that nunchaku are illegal in many municipalities. There are several states to which they cannot be shipped. Even in those locations where they are nominally allowed, being stopped with a pair on your person might cause law enforcement officers to raise eyebrows. The image of the nunchaku as some ninja toy or 1970s street-thug weapon makes it a legal liability

Lost in this war of imagery and reputation is the fact that the nunchaku, apart from any hype or lingering marketing silliness (I remember seeing them advertised in the back of martial arts magazines in copy that proclaimed “NUMCHUCKS!” for sale) is the fact that nunchaku are remarkably powerful, entirely effective weapons that can be wielded successfully with a moderate level of training.

Now, I say “moderate” for a reason. You don’t have to be a black belt in the *kuh-rotty* style of your choice to wield the nunchaku, but you do have to invest some time in training and practice. Flexible weapons by their nature require more training to wield efficiently (and safely, from the user’s perspective) than do rigid weapons. This is because the

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business end of a flexible weapon can move in ways that seem unpredictable to the novice. Gravity, momentum, inertia, centripetal force... take the physics terms of your choice and mix and match them. When you start swinging or whipping a flexible weapon, the free end of the tool can take you by surprise. By “surprise,” I mean that you can easily flog yourself in the head or nuts if you’re not careful.

This surprise is a function of ignorance. I don’t mean that negatively. Before you are familiar with what a flexible weapon will do — be it a weighted chain, a sectional metal whip, the nunchaku, bolas, or whatever — you will be surprised by where the free end goes. Once you’ve trained with and understand the weapon, however, you’ll find it behaves quite predictably. This is because it must obey the laws of physics just like everyone and everything else on planet Earth. There are only so many things a flexible weapon can and will do as long as you don’t suddenly enter the mythical world of frictionless, airless physics exam problems. Understanding this and understanding the weapon will erase any fear or doubts you might have about wielding such a tool.

Among those familiar with nunchaku, I’ve seen some objections to training with or using the weapon. I think these are a product of failing to understand the tool, rather than any deficiencies in it.

One of the biggest concerns among self-defense exponents who don’t prefer the nunchaku is the danger of getting hit with the weapon. It’s true that beginners often strike themselves. The only way around this is to train safely using padded starter nunchaku.

Even padded trainers will hurt. I flailed myself in the groin with a pair of foam nunchaku when I was just starting out.

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I'm glad I knew enough to start with the foam — and I'm glad nobody saw it when it happened. Only practice will teach you to move the nunchaku and to move them well, without endangering yourself.

Once you've learned to move the nunchaku around the body, you have to learn how to strike with the tool. If you strike a target — particularly an unyielding target like a wooden dummy, a tree, or a wall — the free end of the nunchaku will snap back and could even damage your own arm or wrist. This is simple physics. As you will learn in the pages of this booklet, the key to striking with the nunchaku is thus *follow-through*.

Every strike with the nunchaku is (or should be) a committed, integrated body motion. The nunchaku is pulled through the target as if you are trying to cut your way through whatever it is you are hitting (a motion similar in some ways to draw-cutting with a sword, or even sharpening a knife blade — the blade is drawn through the target or the hard surface of the sharpening stone as if trying to shave off a piece of it). Combined in a fluid fighting methodology, each strike with the nunchaku melds with the next strike, resulting in an impressive flurry of looping, whirling wood and connecting cord or chain. The point of the exercise is *not* to look good moving the nunchaku, however — it is to hit things with the free end and then almost literally drag the free end through the motion in order to stop it from snapping back into the operating limb. If you've picked up this booklet so you can look sexy while swinging your “numb-chucks,” I have one word for you: “Bwoooooaaaah!” Now, knock it off.

Done properly, this striking with follow-through prevents the free end of the nunchaku from touching the wielder's body with enough force to do harm. When moving the nunchaku around the body — such as whipping it laterally to stop at

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either side of the torso, or to catch it under the arms or behind the back — there is always a fine line between wielding the weapon and simply flagellating yourself. With practice the tool will barely touch you as it sheds its momentum (or whatever the appropriate physics terminology might be), coming to rest or being caught after you whip it completely through its striking arc(s).

Nunchaku, wielded properly, are more dangerous than simple clubs. The connecting cord or chain isolates the wielder from the force of the strike — force that is transmitted up the length of a simple club or baton. That cord or chain also allows the wielder to develop a remarkable amount of kinetic energy in delivering force. Tucked under one arm or held low in front of the body, the nunchaku can be whipped up and into a target with surprising speed and (with practice) acceptable accuracy.

It's been said using the nunchaku is too difficult to learn to do well — that you can learn weapons that are more effective (and more likely to be legal) in less time. This may be true, but I believe in being as prepared as possible — and learning to use as many different weapons as possible. Nunchaku may take more time to learn than another weapon (though no more than any other flexible weapon, in my opinion), but once learned they hit incredibly hard, are easily concealed, can be made without metal, and are simple to construct with few hand tools. All of these are benefits to the prepared woman or man of action who must improvise a weapon in certain survival scenarios.

As a long-time student of the martial arts who has moved from style to style over the years, I took the utility of the nunchaku as self-evident. I've seen the weapon in different styles descending from different peoples. I've read numerous books (some good, some bad) on its use. I've

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seen countless examples of it for sale — handmade, commercially produced, traditional and non-traditional, plain and ridiculous gaudy... anything you could imagine. I would have thought any fighter, any survivalist, any student of self-defense, would see the benefit of the nunchaku (and of knowing how to use the weapon). I've been surprised to learn that this is not always the case — but it's my hope that I can persuade some of this weapon's critics to see it for what it is.

This booklet will teach you, simply and clearly, how to wield the nunchaku as an expedient weapon of self-defense. It's not a long booklet because this topic does not need to be that complicated. Unlike previous books on the nunchaku, it does not treat the weapon as some martial-artsy implement of tradition. I do cover some of the traditional methods of moving the nunchaku, to get you comfortable moving it, and I will show you a couple of simple postures and methods that are also common to other nunchaku manuals, but I'm not giving you an exhaustive treatise on all the different ways the weapon can be manipulated, held, spun, or swung. Instead, I'm going to give you the essentials, the practical principles and methods, in the most efficient and accessible manner possible.

This is a simple how-to manual that explains precisely what you must know to understand the basics of carrying, moving, and using the nunchaku to deliver decisive force to another individual. It contains no secrets and it asserts no ancient knowledge. It is practical, it is pragmatic, and it is concerned with nothing save results.

You should do and be the same.

GUARD POSTURES

Guard postures are frequently misunderstood. A guard — essentially a ready stance, like a front or side stance in any martial art — is a platform from which to deliver techniques. It also (hopefully) protects your body's vulnerable points, making it at least a little more difficult for an opponent to strike you. It is not, however, a pose you strike and maintain. All guards are momentary positions only. Guarding, moving, striking, and guarding again is a dynamic process. At no time should your guard be a static posture adopted so you can hang out there like a potted plant, looking cool and waiting for the other guy to make the next move.

There will be times when you can't take a guard at all, when you can't assume any sort of formal posture. This is true of all self-defense. Sometimes, shit happens, as the old saying goes, and you must defend yourself from any position and using whatever limb happens to be free, from — standing, prone, sitting, cramped, contorted, lying in bed, whatever — in order to protect yourself or deliver a preemptive strike or counter-attack. That's not something you can learn from a book. You'll have to become comfortable using the nunchaku and moving to defend yourself before you can tackle improvising based on guts, will, and survival instinct. As such, learn the guard postures and learn to strike from them. You can then practice on your own to become comfortable moving (and then striking with) the nunchaku from and in unusual and difficult postures, situations, and environments.

Before we begin, let's talk about the basic nunchaku, which up to now we've just assumed you understand from a physical standpoint. There are numerous models on the

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market, ranging from wood to metal to synthetic. They can be had with connecting cord or with chain (often with ball-bearing swivels, which make a terrible racket). They can be had in numerous gaudy colors and even in competition models that are lighter than true defensive tools. Some of the competition models even light up when you put glow-sticks in their hollow handles.

For our purposes, you want a heavy pair of nunchaku whose handles are roughly a foot long each. Smaller people can get away with much shorter nunchaku, but a foot is a good benchmark. Nunchaku of roughly this size (give or take) are probably the most common commercially available models, but the beauty of nunchaku is that you can make your own if you've a mind to do so.

Choosing cord or chain is up to you, as is the specific length connecting the handles. I don't think it makes a whole lot of difference when you start out, but you'll learn the subtleties of how nunchaku of different sizes and cord-lengths move when you compare them to each other. Be careful and go slow whenever you start with a new pair. I would also strongly recommend starting with foam trainer nunchaku (available from many martial arts supply stores) before you move up to hardwood. This will save you potential injury as you learn the weapon.

Okay, we're ready to start. I'm going to explain this in terms of holding and wielding the hardwood nunchaku. (We'll be dealing with a single nunchaku only — not two of them at once. That's too complicated for our purposes and, to be honest, you can pick that up on your own once you've learned to use one well.) After you get comfortable with the foam and understand how not to hit yourself, you can jump in with the wood pairs. Wear head protection (a good padded helmet such as you'd wear for sparring protection

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will work, but add eye protection too — safety glasses at the very least should be worn when learning) and, what the hell, add a cup so you don't have to limp home from your back yard, dojo, or kwoon.

Grip the nunchaku as you would a fighting stick — in a simple hammer grip, leaving a little length below the grip, with your thumb curled around the grip (not extended along the length of the shaft). This is the grip you will use with either hand, whether you have one or both hands on the lengths of the nunchaku.

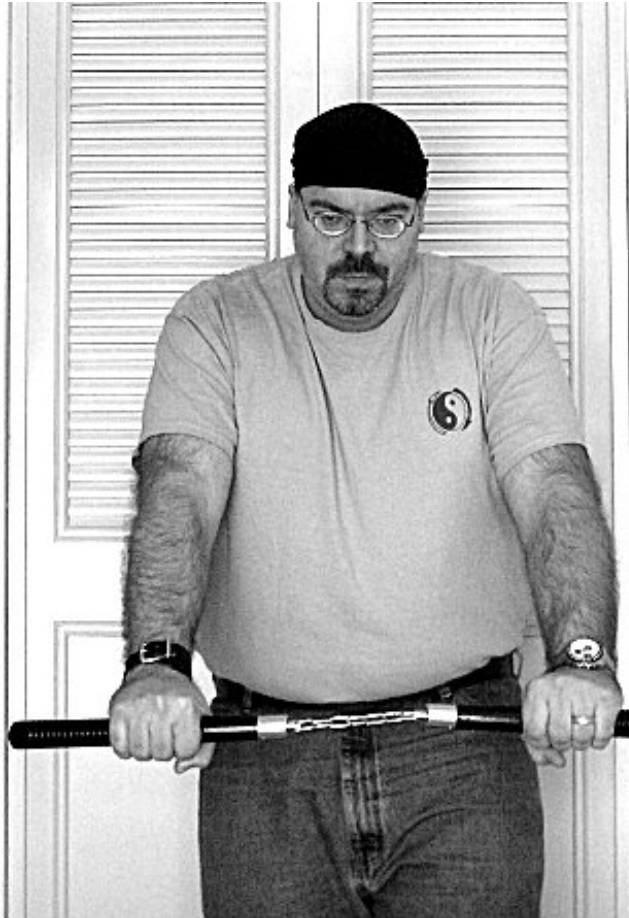


Gripping the nunchaku properly (left) and improperly (right).

The most basic guard puts the nunchaku in front of the body, either low, at middle level (about chest or shoulder height), or high. Keep in mind that portions of your body are vulnerable based on where the nunchaku are relative to you. In a low guard, the upper portion of your torso is vulnerable. In a high guard, the lower part of your torso is vulnerable. In a middle guard, the upper and lower extremes (your head and your shins, let's say) are vulnerable. In all cases, your guard can act as a draw if you are aware of these vulnerabilities. Knowing your opponent will see an opening at your upper body, for example, you can prepare more

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easily for an attack to come at that level (and you can respond or preempt accordingly).



Low guard in front of the body.

In the low guard, the nunchaku is in position to protect your groin and waistline, or thereabouts. Basically, extend your

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arms in front of your body, elbows slightly bent, with the arms angled downhill to guard your junk and your stomach.

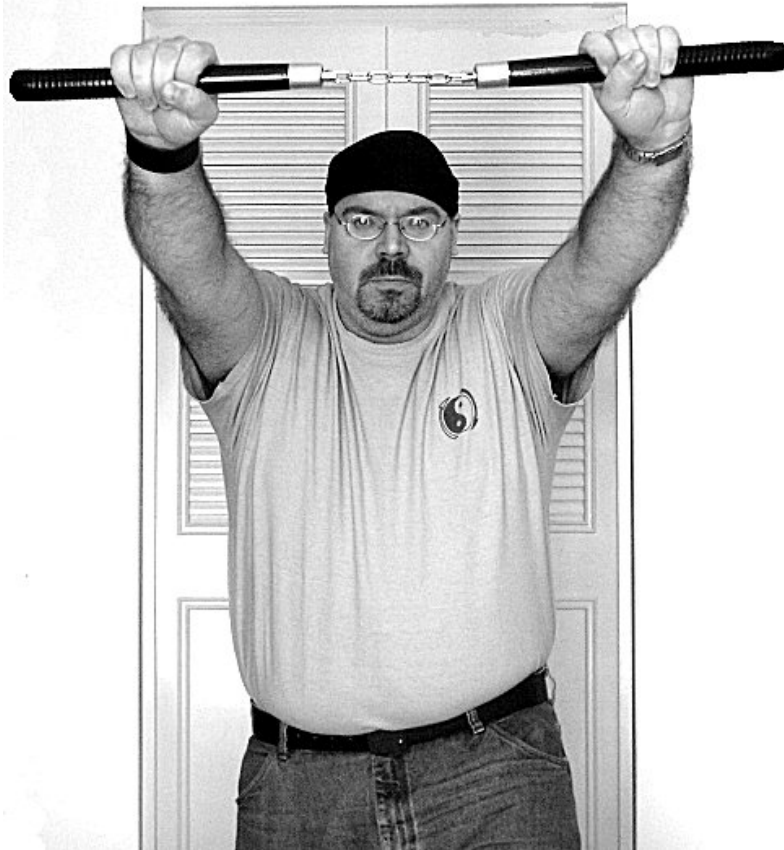


Middle guard in front of the body.

The middle guard puts the nunchaku in front of your body with your arms roughly parallel to the ground, again with the elbows slightly bent. This protects the upper torso and the head, up to a point, and is easily converted to a high or low guard.. Remember that all guards are not static; you're not

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just going to stand there like a potted plant if you can raise or lower your arms to intercept a blow. Every guard position is simply a starting point, a default position.



High guard in front of the body.

The high guard is used to protect from overhead attacks. In all three guards, obviously, you're using the sticks themselves, and sometimes the connecting cord or chain, to deflect, intercept, or jam an incoming attack. Using a cord

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to stop an incoming club can work, but of course you won't be blocking a blade with anything but a chain (and even then it's a risky maneuver). It's not unreasonable to think someone might attack you with a machete-sized long blade, though, so keep this in mind and plan ahead.

The second guard you must learn consists of the nunchaku captured under the arm. This should look familiar to you, if you've seen nunchaku in the movies at all.



Guard position with nunchaku captured under the arm.

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This isn't so much a guard as it is a ready position, because the nunchaku is close to the body with the held end providing relatively little protection. The benefit of this guard is twofold. First, it keeps the nunchaku out of the way and relatively secure while you use the off hand (the free hand, or the hand not holding a weapon), perhaps to grab or to set up a follow-up strike with the nunchaku. Second, it provides a launching platform from which you can whip a very quick strike at the target of your choice. (We'll touch on striking in a bit.)

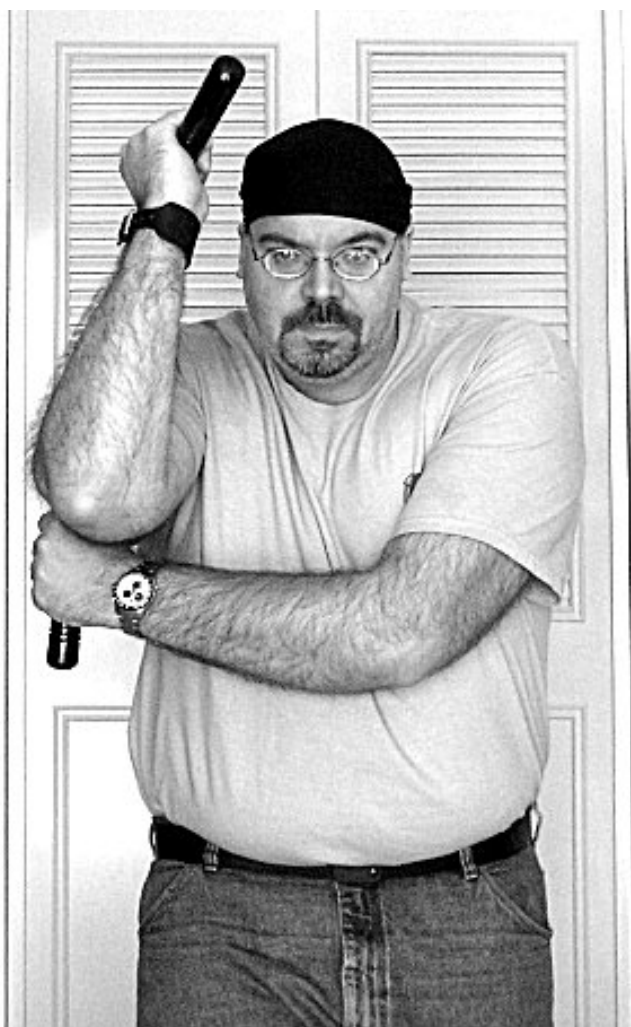


Nunchaku captured behind the back.

Arguably a variation of the second guard, the third guard consists of the nunchaku captured behind the back (or

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shoulder, or arm). This forms a decent shield on the side of the body where the nunchaku is held but, again, the advantage of this guard is that provides a striking platform.



Nunchaku captured behind the back (front view).

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From this position, the nunchaku can be whipped out and down into a target with a great deal of power and quite acceptable accuracy.

That's it; those are the only guard postures you need to know. Guards are defaults that one assumes when one has *time* to assume them. They are the preferred positions from which to launch attacks, but as you practice on your own you'll learn to throw your attacks from wherever your weapon happens to be.

From here, we are ready to learn how to move the weapon.

MOVING THE NUNCHAKU

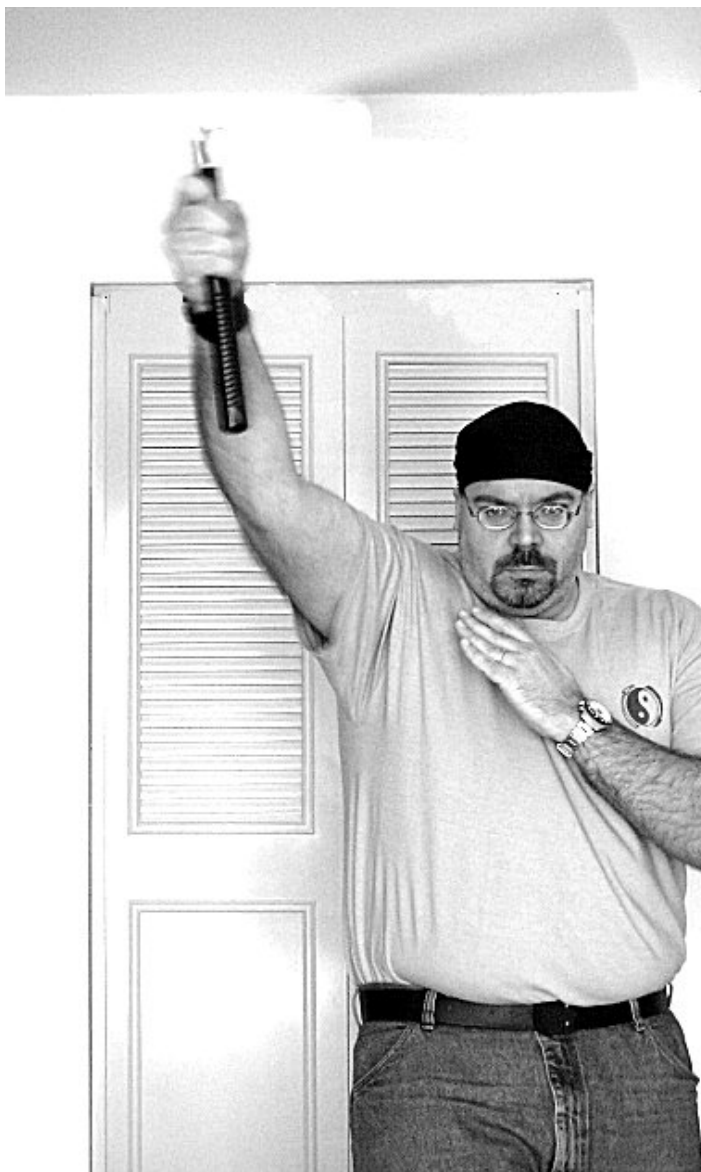
Let's be clear about something from the outset: *Moving* the nunchaku is not the same thing as *striking* with the nunchaku. Learning to move with the nunchaku facilitates striking, but it's a coordination exercise, not a technique as such. The techniques for striking are derived from or developed in part or whole based on these movements, but learning to move the nunchaku around your body is not the same thing as learning to fight with the weapon.

It's possible to spend a great deal of time just moving the nunchaku. While writing this booklet, I watched a martial arts tournament on ESPN-something-or-other (how many of those channels are there, anyway?) that consisted of the usual breaking and weapons forms. As I watched, a series of teenaged girls did amazing things with relatively harmless staffs and aluminum swords. Impressive as it may be to watch a fresh-faced kid spin a lightweight, reflective metallic bo around her body like a helicopter blade, as she executes backflips and screams to punctuate each move, there's very little *martial* skill on display in such spectacles. Remember that as you practice. Whirling the nunchaku around your body doesn't actually accomplish anything by itself.

HELICOPTER SPINS

We'll start with simple helicopter spins. Gripping the nunchaku properly — with a fist, mindful to keep your thumbs wrapped around the shaft and not up on it — use one end as the handle and start spinning the other end above your head like a helicopter. Try spinning it first in one direction and then in the next.

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An overhead helicopter spin.

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As you spin, slowly bring your arm to the side of your body until the helicopter that was over your head is now spinning at the side of your body. Again, spin in both directions.



Side helicopter spin.

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Try transitioning from one direction to the opposite by allowing the nunchaku to brake as you stop rotating your wrist. The free end will slow and then hang loose until you start rotating your wrist again.

FIGURE-EIGHTS

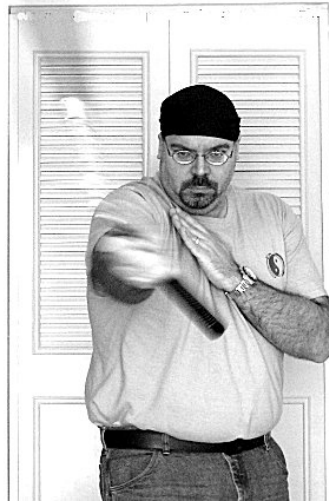


Describing an "8" pattern in the air.

Once you've gotten comfortable making the nunchaku spin in circles, you're ready to start a figure-eight pattern.

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This is important because components of the figure-eight pattern become striking motions. You'll see these attack angles as you draw the handle (and thus the free end) through a *horizontal 8* in front of your body. Every time the free end of the nunchaku moves at a diagonal, it is traveling along the path it would travel if you *hit* someone diagonally — in other words, if you make a natural over-hand or backhand strike.



Use your wrist and a little bit of arm action, depending on the size of the figure-eight. Swing the free end in front of your body in an ever-looping “infinity” shape. Once you can do this reasonably comfortably, speed up.

As the free end of the nunchaku reaches either side of your body (left or right), try transitioning to side spins and then back to the figure-eight pattern. You can also transition to overhead spins when the free end gets to the midpoint of the 8 in front of your body.

WHIPS AND STOPS

Moving the nunchaku in the spins and figure-eights described will help you learn just how the weapon handles, hopefully making you comfortable with it. Spinning is like stepping on the accelerator of a moving car, however. It

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teaches you to get the nunchaku moving, but teaches you little about *stopping* it.



Whipping and stopping horizontally.

A flexible weapon like the nunchaku is a weapon whose secret is its *momentum*. In order to stop the swinging end of the nunchaku, you've got to find a way to shed its momentum. Either you'll expend that momentum as kinetic energy delivered into (through) a target, or you'll expend that momentum in the air. Try whipping the nunchaku around

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your body horizontally. This isn't nearly as hard as it sounds. Bring the nunchaku across your body through an arc that lets it expend its momentum as it turns around your lower torso. The tip of the nunchaku spends its kinetic energy in the air as part of its turn, without ever actually hitting you. At most, when you whip the nunchaku around your lower body in this way, you'll feel like your tapping or slapping yourself. (Remember, "There's a fine line between nunchaku practice and self-flagellation.") Start slowly at first, then speed up to get the feel of it. This isn't something anyone can really describe to you in writing. You've got to *feel* your way through it once you're comfortable moving the nunchaku.

Now try whipping the nunchaku downward, at the sides of your body, as if you're trying to strike an invisible bug on the floor next to you (either on the right or the left depending on which arm holds the weapon). Don't actually hit the floor. Instead, whip the nunchaku through its arc and let it shed its momentum as it pulls through that arc, almost like a helicopter performing a "hammerhead stall." Done correctly, you'll make some fairly impressive noises with the nunchaku as it slices through the air and then loses its momentum on the opposite side of the arc. It will come up and then fall back like a helicopter stalling. ***KEEP YOUR LEG OUT OF THE WAY!*** You've got to be careful never to cover yourself.

You can do the same by whipping the nunchaku back up, so that it loses its momentum and falls down the opposite side of your arm (almost as if you were adopting the behind-the-back ready stance, though don't try to catch it yet). Keep doing this until you are comfortable whipping the nunchaku around and letting it shed its momentum around your body without hurting you. Be careful, when you whip the nunchaku up, to keep it in a plane that will NOT intersect your face! As always, start with foam trainers before you graduate to wood. I whacked myself many a time at first.

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SPINS AND CAPTURES

Now that you're comfortable spinning and whipping the nunchaku around your body, you're ready for the cool part. We're going to start spinning the nunchaku and then capturing it. Perform any helicopter spin, or even a figure-eight in front of the body. If you start with an overhead spin, slowly move your arm down to your side so the spin moves at your side (and forward). When you're ready, turn your wrist over and lift your arm, then slap it down again to catch the nunchaku under your arm and stop it. This takes a sort of twist of the wrist to accomplish from a spin and is hard to describe. It's one of those things you just have to feel out.



Catch the nunchaku under your arm as shown.

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Once you've caught the nunchaku, let the free end fall. You could spin it some more, or go directly to a behind-the-back catch. To do this, either from a spin or just from under your arm, swing it up over your shoulder as if you're throwing something over your back (but don't let go, obviously). Move your free hand across your body and under your weapon arm to catch the nunchaku as it swings over your shoulder.

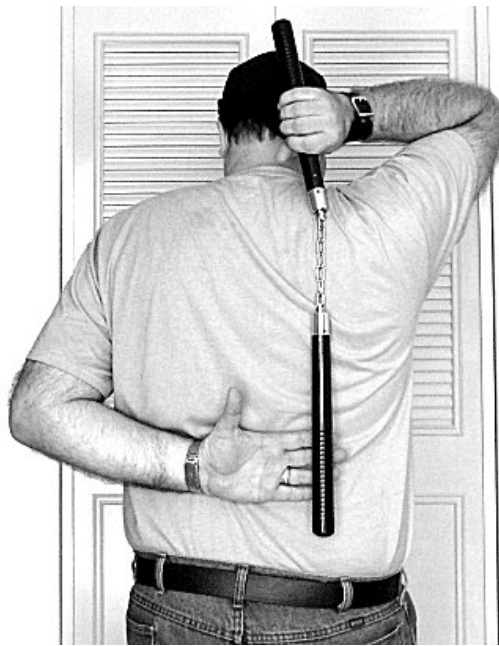


Throw the nunchaku up over your shoulder and catch it with your free hand under the weapon arm.

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From here you could start using your left arm as your weapon arm, because the end of the nunchaku you've just caught can become the handle. You can see the application here instantly, I hope — anytime you whip the nunchaku up over your shoulder and catch it, you can then bring the nunchaku over to the other side and start swinging, whipping, and spinning it with your left arm instead.

When you throw the nunchaku up over your shoulder and let the free end fall down across your back, you can also put your free hand *behind* your back to catch it across your back. This is a movement transition just as before, but instead of bringing the switch in front, it brings the switch up from around behind.



Catching (switching) behind the back.

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MANIPULATING AROUND THE BODY

When all of these elements come together — spinning, whipping, stopping, catching, and switching — you can manipulate the nunchaku around your body. As I said before, this accomplishes nothing, really, but it's fun, makes you comfortable with manipulating the weapon, and looks reasonably cool if you're into that kind of thing. It's a very helpful drill for improving your dexterity and making the swinging and flowing with the nunchaku second nature, so it's worth doing for that reason alone. A simple manipulation sequence might go like this:



You draw the nunchaku, let the free end fall behind you, and swing your weapon arm up and over, throwing the free end behind your shoulder and catching it in front of your body with your free hand. You are then free to spin and catch...



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...and then flip the nunchaku up over your shoulder again, catching it behind your back, pulling it through with your left hand and using it on the left-hand side. You can then throw it over the left shoulder, catch it with your now-free right hand, and you've transitioned back to the hand with which you started.

The more you practice and learn to feel your way through moving the nunchaku — I cannot stress enough the need to *feel* it in order to know it — the easier will come the flow from technique to technique that is necessary for smooth manipulation of the nunchaku around the body.

There are all kinds of different ways to flip, swing, switch, stop, and catch the nunchaku, including reverse flips from the same-side hand, fancy under-leg snatches, behind-the-back handoffs, and the like. Once you've learned the basics you could move on to learning these, if it amuses you. Doing so makes absolutely no difference to striking and defending yourself with the nunchaku (the topic of the next section), but it does no harm, either. The more comfortable you are with the nunchaku, the easier you'll find wielding it under pressure and stress (such as in self-defense).

SELF-DEFENSE WITH THE NUNCHAKU

In a self-defense scenario (presuming you can legally use the weapon and are justified in applying a weapon to a self-defense altercation — consult all applicable laws and do your homework on justified use-of-force), you'll have the weapon in your hand at some point. That's a given. However you carry it, however you get to it, sooner or later, the nunchaku is in your fist and the opponent is in your face.

If you have the time and the room in which to do so, you could adopt one of the guards or ready positions we previously described. Under the arm is good, for example, because it keeps your free hand *free* while keeping the nunchaku close to the body and out of grabbing range (usually). It doesn't really matter, though. From wherever the nunchaku is, you must be able to lash out and across, forward and down (and at diagonal angles), or up into the target.



From under the arm, lash out and forward.

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***From a low forward guard,
whip the nunchaku across.***

The nunchaku, after all, is primarily a striking weapon. To use it for self-defense means you will use to hit your opponent. With a little practice and some experimentation you can come to see the lashes across, overhand strikes, and underhand strikes available from each position.



***From the behind-the-back capture,
whip the nunchaku forward.***

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From cocked back to the rear, swing the nunchaku over and down into the target.

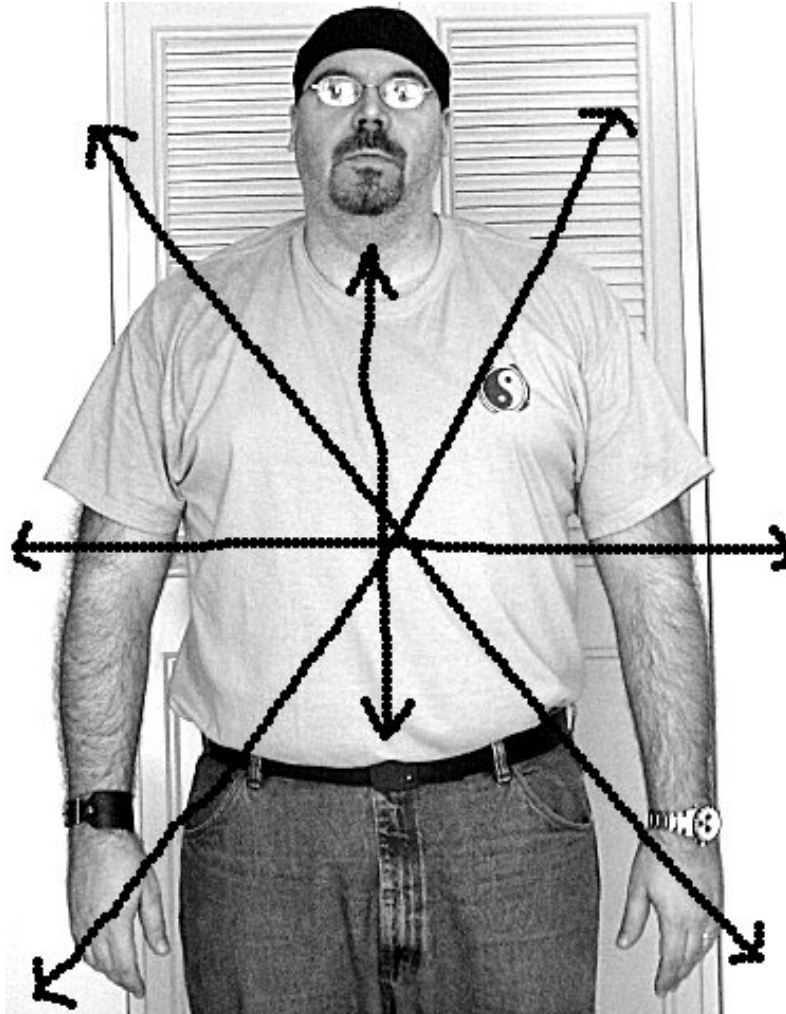
Knowing exactly when to draw and deploy a weapon, or awareness and self-defense scenarios themselves, are beyond the scope of this instructional booklet on the nunchaku. We shall focus, then, simply on the notion that you are armed with a nunchaku (legally), that you have successfully drawn the weapon in a scenario for which a weapon is desirable and justifiable, and that you are now going to HIT THAT BASTARD with your nunchaku. While the examples just described show you how to execute the basic mechanics of a strike from any position (you can explore these and do a little work on your own to get comfortable with them), there are two important points. One is targeting. The other is follow-through and the issue of *snapback*.

TARGETING

Flailing away with the nunchaku will not help you if you do not target your opponent properly. Your weapon can be lashed or swung at the opponent horizontally, vertically, or

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diagonally. The easiest way to cope with targeting is to picture the opponent thusly:



Targeting the opponent: Picture the center of these intersecting lines moving to vulnerable areas.

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The angles of attack all come together at a central point. That central point is the target. Now, you're not going to attempt to "nunchuck" the opponent's sternum, in most cases (at least not by swinging the nunchaku), but that doesn't matter. Picture the center of those lines moving around the opponent's body. Now you have angles of attack that sweep the end of the nunchaku right into vulnerable points, if the center of the crossing lines stops to rest on things like the opponent's head, his knees, his elbows, etc.

If the central point rests over the opponent's head, for example, you can swing the nunchaku down onto the opponent's skull, or across into the sides of his head to his temples, or even into his neck.

If the center of the lines moves to a protruding limb, such as an arm or leg, you can swing the nunchaku through those same angles to attack the elbow or knee (hopefully breaking it) or even the hand (which could be the target of a glancing disarm strike or of a crushing blow that breaks fingers).

Some of the principles of fighting that I discuss in my book, *Shorthand Empty Hand*, and in other martialist publications of PhilElmore.com, still apply here. Specifically, you want to keep your nunchaku up and maintain your guard, moving to maintain space, pressing forward whenever possible. Strike targets of opportunity and make sure you target the body's most vulnerable areas – the head and face, the neck and throat, the groin, the elbows, the knees, and even the ankles if they're offered. These are universal vulnerable areas.

NOTE: Choke **up** on the nunchaku handle for greater control of the tip. Choke **down** on the nunchaku handle to generate more power.

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SNAPBACK AND FOLLOW-THROUGH

As I said earlier, *every* strike with the nunchaku must be a committed, integrated body motion. This is because of *snapback*, a name we'll use for the physics of striking with a flexible weapon. When you hit something with a flexible weapon, either that weapon will wrap around the target (as a chain or whip may, depending on the target and the point along the flexible length where the target and the weapon meet) or the tip of the weapon will come *snapping back at you*. When you strike a hard, unyielding object with the nunchaku, if you do not follow through with your strike, the nunchaku will bounce back and, retained by the cord attaching it to the handle end, hit your hand, your wrist, or your body (depending on where you are with relationship to the weapon). This snapback is obviously something you wish to avoid.

To compensate for snapback, therefore, you must follow-through with your strikes. *Pull* the nunchaku through the target. When you do so, bring it back to a safe point along your body where it can shed any leftover momentum (learning to do this physically is the purpose of the whipping drills we discussed earlier).

NOTE: Do not follow-through with the nunchaku in a way that brings the point back towards a vulnerable part of your own body, such as your head! You may do yourself great harm.

Done properly, striking with follow-through prevents the free end of the nunchaku from touching the wielder's body with enough force to do any damage.

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Following through this high may snap the nunchaku into your head!



Starting the strike...

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... and following through at a safe level.

OTHER TECHNIQUES

The nunchaku, as a flexible weapon, can be used for techniques such as locks, chokes, and even pinching. It can also be used as a short-range bludgeon. Try playing around with these a little bit and you'll see some of the possibilities.

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Holding both ends of the nunchaku in the hand, it can be used as a simple, short-range bludgeon, almost like a double-headed billy club.

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From the other end, backhand strikes can be extremely powerful, especially if you put the weight of your body behind the blow.

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Use the push-pull technique to grab and trap an offered limb.



Zone your body when you push and pull in order to get out of the way and put your opponent off-balance.

Never forget that the nunchaku is, once you remove from it all the mystique of years of martial arts movies, simply a club. Yes, it's a club with a chain attaching its ends, and yes, this makes the weapon behave in a manner that is very much more complex than that of a club, but really, it's just a heavy stick with which you're going to beat someone.

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PARTING THOUGHTS

Learning to use the nunchaku for self-defense does not mean advocating it over other weapons. It simply means adding it to your repertoire. When you consider how ridiculously easy it is to manufacture rudimentary nunchaku from wood and rope or even pipe fittings and chain, understanding how to wield such a truly effective weapon of blunt force makes a certain amount of sense for any person of action. Obviously I do not advocate manufacturing this weapon where it is illegal (the pictures for this booklet were taken in a state where the nunchaku are legal). I certainly do not recommend carrying it if you will get into trouble for doing so.

When and where you can do it, however, carrying a pair of nunchaku in your waistband is remarkably easy to do, and the weapon is relatively well concealed as a result. It can be drawn in this manner quickly and deployed in the fashion described herein. Armed with the nunchaku, you are *well-*armed indeed.

Remember that self-defense is not a duel. It is not a Kung Fu movie. It is an asymmetrical task performed by you in order to go home to your family intact and inviolate at the end of the day. It is nothing more and nothing less. Do not substitute for reality your own presuppositions, desires, or fantasies. Reality-based self-defense requires, first and foremost, that we recognize *reality*.

Good luck. Oh, and “Bwoooooaah.”

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SIBLING WEAPON: WEIGHTED CHAIN

Closely related to the nunchaku is the weighted chain — and any other flexible length of cord, rope, or cloth (such as a bandana with weight tied off on either end, or a bike chain with a padlock, or a belt with a heavy buckle) with weight added to one or both sides.



My first exposure to the *manrikigusari* came in the form of Charles V. Gruzanski's book, *Ninja Weapons: Chain and Shuriken*. First printed in 1968 in Japan, the hardcover version was titled *Spike and Chain: Japanese Fighting Arts*.

The book asserts that famed swordsman Dannoshin Toshimitsu Masaki was “chiefly responsible” for the development of the weighted chain and its associated methodology over 200 years ago. “Masaki named his weapon *Manrikigusari* [literally, 10,000 power chain] ... because he felt it contained the power and ingenuity of 10,000 persons.”

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Bandana with weights tied into both ends.

Master at Arms James A. Keating detailed the use of flexible weapons as whips and grappling tools in his Combat Bandana videos. The weighted chain offers all of the advantages of such a flexible weapon (be it a bandana, a belt, a rope, or what have you) while offering both improved strength and greater striking weight. The physics of a flexible weapon terminating in a weight are obvious. What the chain strikes, the weight helps it to ensnare. I remember as a kid watching a Western adventure show in which a character used a bola weapon to ensnare and bring down a running man. I have been fascinated by the mechanics of such weapons ever since.

The weighted chain is, therefore, a close-quarters grappling weapon that is also a striking tool at longer ranges. It can

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even be used to strike at short ranges as a fist load or as a short sap, depending on how it is held.

BUILDING THE WEIGHTED CHAIN

There are *manrikigusari* on the market with nice hexagonal weights — but these are attached to inferior light chains about the weight of dog leashes. Avoid these, as they're not very strong and have no "legitimate sporting use," as the politicians like to say. Such a weapon will always be seen as a martial arts toy and will get you in trouble if it is discovered.

A durable, effective weighted chain is as close as your hardware store. First, find the chain and steel cable section. Then, find yourself a helpful clerk.



Getting chain cut to size at the hardware store.

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Have the hardware store clerk cut you a section of medium-weight chain about the width of your shoulders. You don't want the chain to be too long or it will be awkward, but it must be long enough to effectively guard your body.

Next, get a pair of padlocks. Keyed-alike padlocks are a must. You want to be able to carry only one key for both. The padlocks must fit through the links of your chain, of course, so keep this in mind when selecting both chain and locks.

Attach your locks to the ends of the chain. The resulting weapon is a *manrikigusari* of contemporary construction that doubles as a bike chain or general-use security tether.

Check your local laws, incidentally. Don't do anything illegal.



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INTUITIVE STRIKES WITH THE WEIGHTED CHAIN

Because of its substantial weight, the chain can be bundled up in the palm as a fist load for the most intuitive of striking. There isn't much to this. You simply slug your target with the mass of the chain and the padlocks. It's a little sloppy, but it works.



Fist load (left) and using padlocks for a handle (right).

Using the padlocks as a handle (or perhaps more appropriately, as a handle *stop* to keep the chain anchored in your hand) you can use the folded length of the chain as a flogging tool. This is also a fairly simple technique, though now you have to contend with snapback from the chain after it strikes an unyielding surface.

GRAPPLING WITH THE WEIGHTED CHAIN

Advanced grappling with the weighted chain is beyond the scope of this booklet. You should be able to see the implications, however. If you can swing and strike the chain against an opponent's limb or neck, the chain will *wrap* that object. Now, before I get ahead of myself, please understand that we're not talking about using the chain to deflect incoming full-speed blows. Most of the time you

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simply will not be fast enough to manage something like this. The chain can be used, however, to ensnare offered limbs in the course of a physical altercation, especially if you're dealing with someone stupid enough to grab at you or to throw a half-hearted fist or slap.

There are a number of protective postures you can adopt using the chain. The simplest is simply to hold the chain in front of you, ready to rotate it or loop it over targets of opportunity:

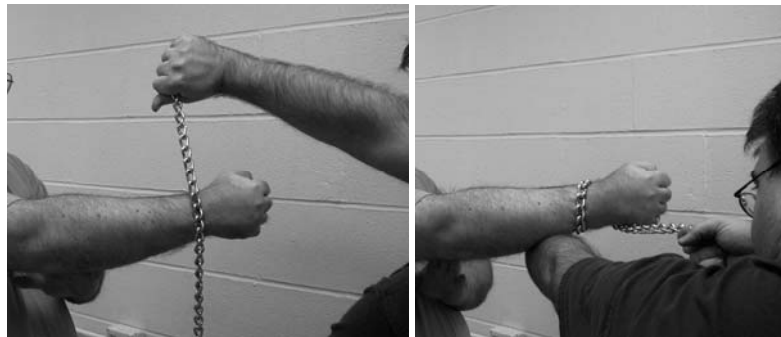
There are other methods, such as holding the chain cocked vertically behind your back. For more information I would suggest Gruzanski's aforementioned text on the topic, but I don't think the weapon needs to be that complicated.



Ready position in front of the body.

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Snaring any limb is a matter of both pushing and pulling. This not only entangles the limb but also produces a grating, sawing effect that is quite unpleasant when done properly. In the next two photos, my assistant Kevin (left) exaggerates a half-hearted lunge with his fist so I can demonstrate this pushing and pulling mechanic. Once you've got the limb, of course, you've got to *move*, for holding it doesn't help you if you just stand there. If you understand how to follow up after applying a joint lock, you understand how to move out of danger while pulling the limb up and out to force your opponent's body down in an assisted "lock" like this.



Pushing and pulling (which must be accompanied by moving or "zoning" the body) to ensnare the limb and facilitate follow-up.

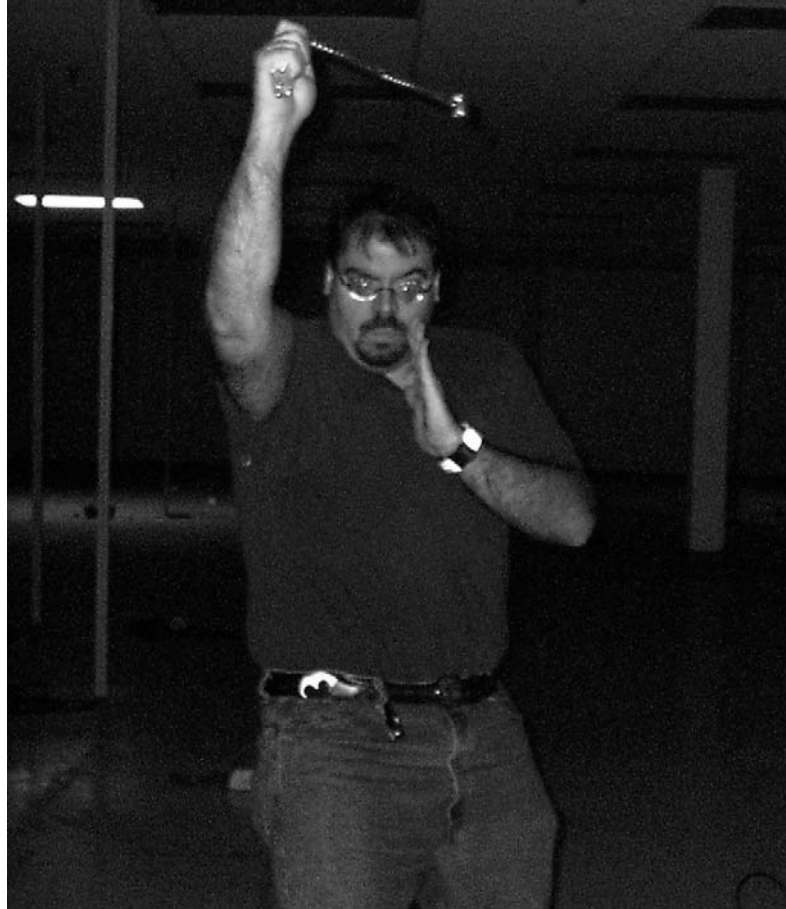
Don't practice techniques like these on other people without qualified supervision.

SWINGING THE CHAIN

Swinging the weighted chain in tight circles helps you build momentum for strikes and can have a deterrent effect when done before the body. (It won't fool someone who knows how to counter the chain, however — swinging the chain in

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figure eights just invites the knowledgeable opponent to grab and thus neutralize it.)



Overhead "helicopter" swing.

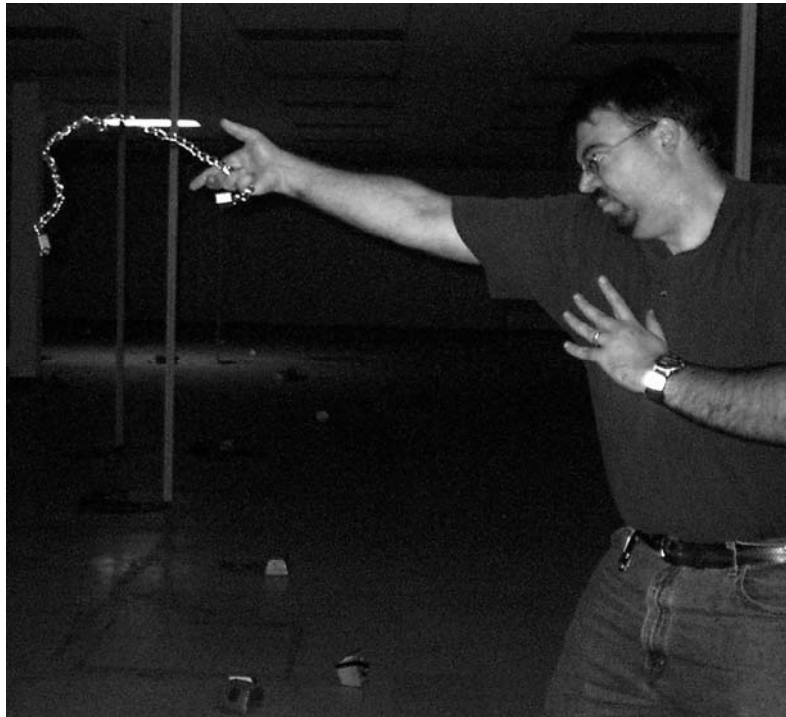
No one can teach you how to do this beyond imparting the concept. You must practice moving the chain (please wear eye protection until you have it down) to get a feel for how

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the weapon moves — and how it moves when you take the swing into a strike or cast.

One of the simplest swings is the overhead “helicopter” movement, from which the chain can be brought easily into a forward strike with a whip of the arm (the circular motion is accomplished using the wrist alone).

CASTING THE CHAIN



Casting the chain. Note position of the fingers.

Casting the chain is a method of whipping it out to strike a target without preliminary swinging. The chain is held

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bunched in the palm with one weight forward. The arm is then thrust forward and the thumb and forefinger opened to facilitate the cast. It is the last three fingers of the hand that retain the chain (for, as in most grips, it is these three fingers that exert the most power in gripping an object).

With practice, you'll be able to "load" your hand with the weighted chain and then lash out with it, casting it into the target of your choice within an effective range that is the length of your chain. I can hit pretty much whatever I aim at now, and if I can learn to do it, you certainly can.

SNAPBACK



Chain cast immediately after full extension, showing the beginning of the snapback.

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Any flexible weapon will *snap back* after hitting a target. The only way to cope with snapback is to follow through with your strikes and do a lot of practice to learn the feel, mechanics, and tendencies of the weapon. Be sure to wear eye protection, train under qualified supervision, and do your best not to thunk yourself in the head with your weighted chain. I've managed to practice with the weapon successfully without incurring major injury, but there is always the possibility. Never practice with weapons, especially unfamiliar weapons, if you are tired or distracted.

No single book or chapter in one can leave you fully equipped to wield an unfamiliar weapon, but these concepts should get you started. The *manrikigusari* is an ancient weapon that remains relevant in contemporary self-defense. Practice often — and practice safely.

Phil Elmore

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Phil Elmore is a martial artist and professional writer whose work has appeared in a variety of print and virtual publications. He is not a lawyer, a police officer, or a member of the military. He is a private citizen who believes your rights to your life and your property are inalienable.



The publisher of *The Martialist™: The Magazine For Those Who Fight Unfairly*, Phil has published numerous books that you might find useful in your study of self-defense. These include the Paladin Press titles *Street Sword* and *Flashlight Fighting*, as well as the Booklocker.com text *Shorthand Empty Hand*. For more information, visit Phil online at www.philelmore.com and www.themartialist.com.

I have an impressive nunchaku collection, of course. The tools of my trade. In the hands of a master, nunchakus are one of the most effective and beautiful fighting tools ever conceived. Of course, one doesn't find or buy nunchakus. A true master's nunchakus find him. Or her. But, yeah, mostly him."

— Scott Roeben

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