

PART I

WHAT MAKES GOOD TECHNIQUE?

By BJJ black belt Michael Jen

What makes good technique? We hear it all the time in jiu-jitsu training- “He has good technique” or “He’s very technical”. The answer you may get to this may vary from person to person, however, one of the most common responses is that good technique means not using a lot of strength. While that may be true, I want to examine the definition of this term in closer detail and how it relates to your training.

The idea of not using a lot of strength is subjective. For example, a very large and muscular man may pick up a heavy object with extremely poor form, yet feel that he is using very little strength. However, a smaller, weaker man may attempt to pick up the same heavy object in the same manner or better form and feel as if he is using every ounce of his strength. Just because the larger man felt as if he used less strength does not mean he picked up the heavy object with better technique. Therefore, with this idea in mind, we cannot really define having good technique in jiu-jitsu solely based on how much strength a person feels they are exerting when executing a movement.

In addition, it is extremely common for those who lack good technique, but do not have the strength to compensate, to use other physical attributes such as speed, flexibility, and/or endurance to compensate. With that being said, let us make it clear that there is no such thing as technique that requires no strength, no speed, no flexibility, or no endurance. A person who is completely void of physical attributes is either sleeping, dead, or in a coma.

In my opinion, having good technique is about placing your body in the strongest biomechanical position while placing your opponent in his weakest biomechanical position at the exact same time. It is possible for both people to be in suboptimal biomechanical positions, on the other hand, the only way for both bodies to be in their respective strongest biomechanical positions, would be if there was no physical contact but then in that case, nothing would be accomplished and you wouldn’t actually be grappling.

This is due to the fact that a law of physics states that two objects cannot occupy the same space at the same time. Because jiu-jitsu is a grappling art that involves full body contact, we can apply this law of physics. If one person’s body is in its strongest biomechanical position in relation to his opponent, it is impossible for the other person to also be in his strongest biomechanical position. In other words, let’s say a particular part of your body needs to be at a certain point in space in order to be in its biomechanically strongest position, however, a part of **my** body occupies that space instead. This means that particular part of your body must now occupy in a position that is suboptimal.

Now here's the beauty of physics and its application towards simplifying jiu-jitsu. Rather than thinking about how to manipulate your opponent's body into its weakest biomechanical position, simply pay attention to placing your body in its strongest biomechanical position. Remember that law of physics. As long as your body is in the strongest position possible in relation to your opponent and there is physical contact, your opponent will automatically be in a weaker biomechanical position. Especially for beginners, it's much easier to pay attention to what is going on with your own body than figuring out what is going on with someone else's. Rather than thinking about two things, you only really need to think about one.

When an opponent's body is in a biomechanically weak position, the amount of force they are capable of exerting decreases, their bodies move slower, and it requires more effort energy to move. This should make sense as you can just think about the effect on the body when it comes to the difference in picking up a heavy object with good form versus poor form, especially if you had to do it over and over. Therefore, placing your body in its biomechanically strongest position will automatically decrease the amount of strength, flexibility, and endurance you need to apply, not only because of the obvious fact that you are in a strong position, but also because it puts your opponent in a position that minimizes his ability to apply the full potential of his attributes. This means you do not need to be playing a game that attempts to constantly match your opponent's physical attributes. Isn't that the idea of good technique? Similarly, remember that **if you are in a position does not significantly decrease your opponent's ability to use their attributes, you have not found the position that is truly strongest for your body.** This idea is important in all aspects of jiu-jitsu, but especially when you are on the bottom and need to deal with gravity, your opponent's body weight, and your opponent's attributes.

If you understand this idea, then the obvious next question is about how to put your body in its biomechanically strongest position and your opponent's body in the weakest position. Though the idea of placing one's body in its strongest biomechanical position seems glaringly obvious, actually doing it is not for many grappling practitioners. This now goes into principles of postural alignment and I will discuss this topic in the next article.

The concepts, principles, and scientific approach presented in this article are the cornerstones of the Jen Brazilian Jiu-jitsu system. Specific application, additional details, and further elaboration are covered in my BJJ courses. For the schedule of courses, go to www.jenbjj.com.