

## **Hierarchical Training, Standards and Self Evaluation**

By Chris Fry

Shoot, stab, strike, grapple, impact, illuminate, parry, tourniquet, challenge, diffuse, run or lift...The combat arts for a well rounded practitioner, CCW holder, officer or operator comprise numerous disciplines and sub disciplines. How does the citizen, law enforcement officer or average military serviceman maintain proficiency in each discipline while living a normal life filled with family, job, obligations and limited resources? Is proficiency in each discipline required and/or desired or does the cliché “Jack of all trades, master of none” apply?

I believe that “Multidisciplinary Proficiency” is not only necessary but essential when considering the current environment we live and operate in. In this article essential core disciplines will be outlined. The development of a training hierarchy and how performance standards and self evaluation aid in the development of this hierarchy will also be reviewed. The analysis I offer is solely based upon my own experience studies and continued attempts to improve my understanding and application of these disciplines through training and pressure testing. It is by no means an “expert” opinion, rather a seasoned student’s experience. It is my hope that this article might answer a few questions some individuals have about scheduling and how to prioritize their own training in order to accurately attain and maintain proficiency.

### **The Problem**

With the exception of elite military units and certain special response law enforcement teams we citizens, patrolmen and infantrymen will rarely have the luxury of knowing what type of combative encounter we may be face. If I knew I was going to be in a gunfight I could plan accordingly or avoid the situation altogether. Herein lies the crux of the matter; having the skill sets necessary to deal with a wide variety of situations. Simply having a black belt or possessing a CCW does not prepare me for what I may encounter. One must have variable force options and skill sets to deal with dynamic, changing combative environments. “Specializing” in today’s world could spell disaster.

### **Essential Solutions**

At a bare minimum proficiency in 5 core disciplines and their sub-disciplines should be acquired and maintained. For me these disciplines include:

- 1) **Managing Unknown Contacts (MUC)** – MUC encompasses verbal and physical challenge, diffusion and avoidance skills. In my experience one of the least taught but most utilized and important disciplines. More time is spent talking to known and unknown contacts in our environment than we spend fighting them. This to me is the most relevant skill in our personal defense profile; on a daily basis this skill set is/will be used more frequently than any other.

- 2) **General Physical Preparedness (GPP)** – This to me is an essential combat skill set. It comes second on this list simply because possessing the ability to run away from a potential encounter (or endure a prolonged encounter) should be our foremost tactical consideration. Without a base level of GPP your ability to utilize the skill sets outlined below with the exception of firearms (and that can be argued depending upon range of the encounter) will be severely limited. Some could argue that GPP should be #1 simply because it leads to better health.
- 3) **Practical Unarmed Combative Skills (PUC)** – I believe possessing the ability to defend oneself unarmed should take precedence over weapon/tool skills. Without unarmed defensive and offensive skills and the ability to counter sudden spontaneous attacks whatever tools we do possess could be quickly nullified. PUC skills have been the easiest for me to seek out, train in and attain. PUC training also tends to be much more affordable than other disciplines

Essential PUC Sub-disciplines include:

- a. In-Fight-Weapon-Access
  - b. Defense Against Armed Assailants
  - c. Grappling/Ground Defense
- 4) **Edged/Improvised Weapons Skills (EIW)** - Edged/Improvised Weapons are prevalent, easy to acquire and can be carried in more places than a firearm. For me they have provided a potential lethal force option to carry in non-permissive environments (NPE). EIW is in core disciplines due to the affordability of quality edged weapons, ease of concealment/every day carry and the relatively short amount of time it takes to acquire basic defensive and offensive proficiency
  - 5) **Firearms (CCW)** – Firearms comes last in my personal hierarchy simply because there are non-permissive environments I cannot and do not carry in. The majority of my work is in an NPE, so I am limited to other options (see above). For you it may be different and firearms may be higher on your list and more of your training time will be dedicated to this discipline

This is just an example of my personal training hierarchy. The disciplines I feel are essential and the order in which I determine how much of my limited training time is dedicated to each. This hierarchy may be different for you.

## **Proficiency or Empowerment**

How do we acquire and then maintain proficiency in each of the outlined disciplines? I guess the bigger question is – what do you consider proficient? What standards do you hold yourself to? Is your training done in an effort to succeed and overcome the strictest of tests and standards or to just slide by because you don't enjoy training that particular skill as much as another. Do you focus on making your training empowering by feeling good about what you have done during a class or training session or is your focus on challenging yourself and attempting to overcome previously set goals; sometimes failing?

These questions may seem redundant but they should also make you step back for a moment from your current training regimen and consider where you're at and how you determine which discipline gets most attention, training time and for how long? Developing a training hierarchy is a highly individual process. Setting goals and following performance standards should go hand in hand with the development of a personal training hierarchy.

To quote veteran Law Enforcement Officer, MMA Fighter & Trainer Paul Sharp:  
*“Skills degrade under pressure. Train to the highest possible standard; put yourself under pressure constantly and consistently. The rest will work itself out as part of the evolutionary process.”*

## **Performance Standards and Self Evaluation**

There is no second place in a fight. Establishing performance standards for a specific discipline should not be a random process or left to our “instructor” to determine if we are good enough. Your instructor won't be there to help you during a combative encounter. Each of the various disciplines in our personal hierarchy should follow some type of self evaluation process. A base level of proficiency needs to be demonstrated before shelving that skill set to place greater focus on another or seek training in a new discipline outside our core. Each core skill set/discipline must be trained under fixed-variable conditions and then move into more complex multi-task/multi-variant combative simulations or conditions.

Determining performance standards for each discipline has the potential to be highly controversial. What I determine to be a basic standard may be far and away different than what you determine. For this purpose the standards I provide below are “generic”, to say the least. You can use them or lose them. What is important is that you adhere to some type of self evaluation on a consistent basis or risk stagnation and/or skill loss which is unacceptable. What these generic standards won't evaluate is your ability to make applicable use of force decisions. Please let me be very clear- in my humble opinion there is no such thing as “good enough”, there is always room for improvement.

**MUC Standards-** Managing Unknown Contact skills like all others need to be trained into a conditioned response. Simply yelling at a paper 2D target is not enough. Training must be conducted vs. a live, moving, speaking opponent. But, before jumping into a scenario against a live opponent, key challenge phrases need to be ingrained and easily issued without conscious thought. Once this can be done on command while multi-tasking (moving and/or accessing a tool at the same time) you have met the first standard and can proceed to scenario work.

**GPP Standards-** This is a highly individualized area but there are some specific standards we can strive to achieve which will help us determine how much emphasis we need to place on this discipline. One very useful standard I have found is Ross Enamaitis ( [RossTraining](#)) burpee test.

A burpee is a combination of bodyweight exercises which tax your strength, endurance and anaerobic capacity when done in high repetitions. Ross's standard is 100 burpee's in 10 minutes for an average person/athlete, 5-7 min. for elite athletes. Because the burpee is a multi-body part exercise working the upper body and lower body as well as the cardiovascular system and requires no special equipment the burpee excels as a personal training modality and evaluation tool.

Other GPP standards include any of the LEO/MIL Personal Fitness Tests which are numerous since each unit/agency usually has their own. A good resource to follow is [Ace Any PFT - Stew Smith](#) . Stew Smith is a former NSW Operator who now specializes in physical training and preparedness. Once a basic PFT score is achieved then GPP training can be conducted 3-5 times/week to maintain this level and focus can be shifted to other core disciplines/sub-discipline or a new discipline.

**PUC Standards-** Proficiency in practical unarmed combatives can easily be a life long process. While some have and do achieve a black belt in one style or system in 1.5 years others have been studying a martial system for 12 and still have not achieved this rank. Rank and meeting standards is not the same thing. In my experience formal ranking in martial arts is highly subjective and simply achieving a black belt or instructor credentials does not mean fighting is known and mastered.

PUC standards should follow a more objective path. Specific categories of unarmed defense should be outlined, trained and then pressure tested. If the pressure test is successfully navigated repeatedly on a consistent basis from variable opponents within the context of criminal assault then proficiency has been demonstrated. Simply rehearsing a pre-arranged set of movements against a pre-arranged set of attacks is not demonstrable of skill under pressure or presented in a realistic manner. For PUC a core set of skill sets and sub-sets must be demonstrated:

- 1) Effective Default defense against spontaneous/ambush attack- Trained solo and with partners and then pressure tested via moderate to full force spontaneous attack scenarios vs. single and multiple aggressors
- 2) Demonstration of Speed and Power for a limited number of “Hard Skills” – These skills may include chin-jab, elbow strikes, axe hand, knee strikes, kicks, jab/cross etc. (Specific skills are left to the trainee and or trainee’s coach/instructor to determine). This demonstration can first be performed on focus pads/shields then pressure tested via force-on-force drilling against padded assailants and finally through moderate to full contact sparring wherein only specific techniques are utilized thus demonstrating the ability to apply a skill on demand and during varying circumstances
- 3) Standing Grapple/Clinch- the same hard skills trained at range from your opponent are often difficult or impossible to apply while clinched or engaged in standing grapple. (This is why boxers often close and clinch to rest or weather a barrage of strikes from an opponent). Again, clinch skills are trained and proficiency is demonstrated via the ability to move in and out of and maintain control while in this range at will during moderate to full force sparring. This range may also include defense against and application of grabs and holds
- 4) Counter Take Down- the ability to negate an opponent’s ability to tackle, throw, or pull to the ground. Standards are met when one can consistently negate these attempts during alive, dynamic drilling and moderate to full force sparring against opponents knowledgeable and trained in these types of assaults

\*In-Fight-Weapons-Access, Defense against Armed Assailants and Ground Grappling are sub-disciplines; separate entities requiring specific time and focus. They fall under PUC because they are a natural extension of practical unarmed combat and beyond the scope of this single article.

**Edged/Improvised Weapons Standards (EIW)** - EIW standards begin with demonstrating a basic ability to access a specific tool (In-Fight-Weapon-Access). This skill must be repeatable under dynamic aggression and or moderate to full force drilling, scenarios, sparring. Demonstration of edged weapon hard skills such as movement off lines of attack, basic angles of attack, thrusts, slashes, strikes and combinations of above both solo and under pressure of attack

**Firearm Standards** (CCW) - Similar to EIW the ability to access the concealed (or stored) carry firearm solo and then under pressure of attack is fundamental may supersede even marksmanship. Fundamental marksmanship standards such as 2 rounds into a 2 inch circle from 3, 5 and 7 yards with and without time pressure (timed drill). Combative marksmanship standards include 2 rounds in a 3x5 index card from variable distances under time pressure from in and out of the concealed holster, varied ready positions and varied body positions. Dynamic movement standards from in and out of the holster engaging an 8-9 inch center of visible mass target under time pressure while moving off line of attack in varied directions. Proficiency for all of the above demonstrated via square range drills PRIOR to engagement in live force-on-force scenarios and drills. A couple excellent resources which I have found useful in developing my personal standards include J. Michael Plaxco's book "[Shooting from Within](#)" and Pat Rogers [MEU-SOC Pistol Qualification](#) course (Page 2).

If your standards vary from mine, that's OK. What's important is that you are holding yourself to some performance standard and you are training the skills you need work on based upon self evaluation of those standards. Fill the holes in your personal defense profile before someone discovers and exploits one of them.

### **True Multidisciplinary Proficiency**

Rarely are all or even multiple core disciplines trained in the same class or during the same workout. If we may have to traverse a force continuum ranging from verbal challenge to unarmed contact and perhaps even lethal force via the use of a firearm, why do we train them all separately? Secondly, can't we cover a broader range of skill sets in one workout thus managing time and resources and accomplishing more if we batched several disciplines together? Most importantly is having the ability to transition from one discipline to another under pressure more important than any single discipline individually?

If these questions cause you to take another step back from your current training hierarchy, that is good. True multidisciplinary proficiency is demonstrating that you possess a standard knowledge of each core discipline and you can seamlessly transition between each during a dynamic combative encounter. There are some good multidisciplinary or more commonly referenced "integrated" training programs available such as those offered by [SouthNarc](#), [Progressive F.O.R.C.E. Concepts](#) and [InSights Training Center](#). Another excellent resource is the Integrated Defense Systems Club in Tennessee's [Shadowboxing with Weapons](#) audio CD and DVD which guides you through a true "multidisciplinary" training session.

Whatever you chose to do first take a hard, honest look at what you are currently doing and why. Haphazardly jumping around from class to class or from skill set to skill set without reason or method is a sign of poor planning and preparation. A combative encounter may be completely random, our training shouldn't be.