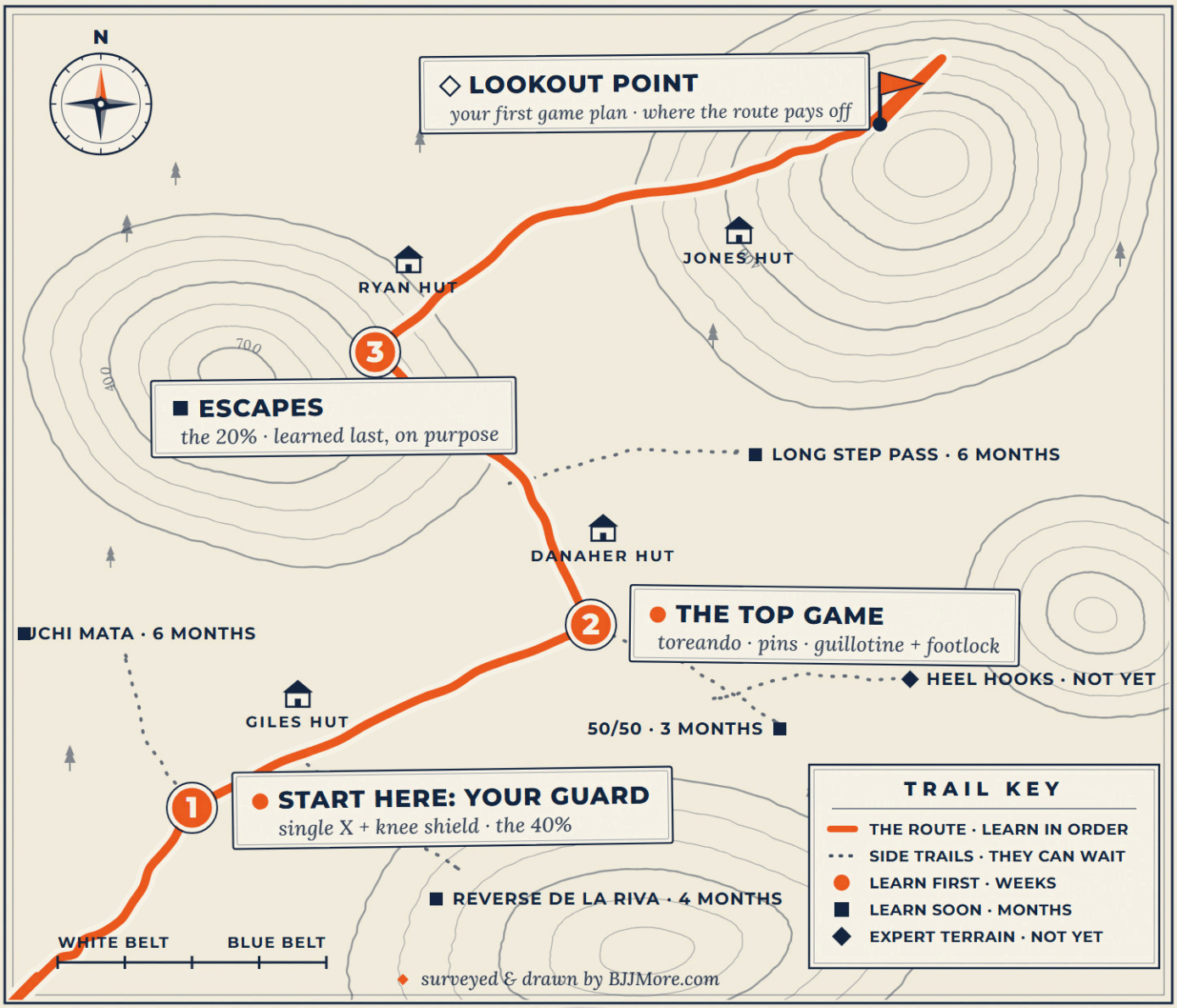
A LEARNING MAP OF BRAZILIAN JIU-JIT

FREE CHAPTERS
INTRO + CHAPTERS 1-2

THE

BJJ MAP

Every technique in jiu-jitsu, which ones actually matter, and what to learn first



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Introduction: The BJJ Map

It took me nearly 4 years to get my blue belt.

After that I got my purple belt, and then my brown belt, within 2.5 years.

What changed? Why did I suddenly learn BJJ so much faster?

The big change was that I got a big picture perspective. I finally saw BJJ as a whole.

There's a tendency in BJJ to zoom in. To zoom into particular techniques. And to zoom in even further to particular *details* of techniques.

And although details are important, I personally focused on them too much. Because of this I couldn't see the forest through the trees, as they say.

This short guide is my attempt to let you see the forest again.

And once you see the forest again, everything will become easier.

You'll see how different techniques go together.

You'll remember techniques better because you know where they are in relation to others.

And you won't get distracted by every 'new' thing you see, because you'll have seen it before (in one form or another).

At least that's what happened for me right before I got my blue belt, and then my purple and brown belt shortly after.

Of course at that point I already trained BJJ for nearly 4 years - but I believe I can give the same thing to you right now, wherever you are in your journey.

This guide is based on a surprising truth about BJJ.

This surprising truth is that there's way less techniques than you think.

BJJ feels endless - and in a way it is, because you can always go deeper into each technique, trying different variations, setups, grips, and so forth, and so further, for ever and ever.

But if you actually sit down and list all techniques in BJJ - every position, every guard, every guard pass, every submission, and so forth - there's really not that many.

And if you take your list of all techniques and you underline all the important ones, it's practically a handful.

And if you then go on to circle all the techniques that are **important *for beginners*** - gosh. It's embarrassing how few techniques you're left with!

And we'll do this exercise, right now.

In the coming chapters I list all techniques in BJJ, and I discuss which techniques are important for beginners.

This way you 1. get that big picture perspective of BJJ I talked about, and 2. know exactly where to start your learning journey.

I wish I had this guide when I was a struggling white belt for almost 4 years. And although I can't make promises about when you'll get your blue belt, I can promise this. After finishing this short guide you'll have something most blue belts don't have: the complete map. Every technique in jiu-jitsu, which ones actually matter, and what to learn first.

The structure of this guide

This guide is structured as follows. There's a separate chapter for each major topic in BJJ: guards, guard passes, pins, escapes, leg entanglements, submissions and takedowns. In each chapter I give you a list of every technique of this type (so every guard, every guard pass, etc.). Then I give a short explanation of each type and I'll tell you which moves you need to start with and why.

The last chapter of this guide puts everything you learned together in a simple game plan. This game plan combines the techniques that you should start with into one coherent plan of attack. It's a great game plan that many white and blue belts use at competition.

And at the end of this guide you'll find a checklist of every technique in it. You can use this to track which techniques you know and which techniques you successfully hit in sparring.

Before we get started with the technical chapters I want to answer some common questions about how to train. You can skip this chapter if you want, but I know that a lot of beginners appreciate these tips.

Chapter 1: 7 tips to learn BJJ quicker

Learning BJJ is hard. Or at least it feels like that sometimes. Even if you train a lot, you might feel like you're not getting better.

What doesn't help is that there's a lot of myths and misconceptions about you should train BJJ.

In this chapter I want to give you some tips to help you avoid some of the most common pitfalls that hold beginner back from improving in BJJ.

Please know that everything I say in this chapter applies to how *most people* benefit the most from their training. But everybody's different, and ultimately you have to find out for yourself how you learn.

1. Roll with higher belts only 20% of the time

***Table**: Who to roll with, how much and what for*

Who?	How much?	What for?
Those worse than you	40%	Skill acquisition
Those of equal skill	40%	Fun & cardio
Those better than you	20%	Expose errors & check ego

John Danaher once said that 90% of your training should be with people of significantly lower skills level than you.

That's an extreme statement.

Setting aside practical problems with this training method (namely, as a beginner you'll feel like everybody else has a higher skill level than you!), I don't fully agree with it.

I do agree with the idea that rolling with lower skilled people can have some benefits:

- It's easier to hit new techniques
- You have more influence over which positions you go into, so you can choose what you train

- Ego is less of an issue if it's clear beforehand who's better

However, you can get these same benefits with other methods, such as specific sparring (where you agree to only work on a specific position or scenario, such as guard passing). And you can adjust how hard you roll to the skill level of your sparring partner.

But my biggest problem with Danaher's rule is that it neglects *fun*. The most fun part of sparring is going back and forth with an opponent of equal skill. So in my opinion you should have a lot of those rolls.

Of course this is different for John Danaher's students, who are professionals. It's correct that they focus only on skill acquisition, regardless of fun. But if we all did that, we might not even enjoy jiu jitsu enough to keep doing it.

So maybe a good compromise is a 40/40/20 rule:

> **Roll 40% of the time with people of lower skill (for skill acquisition), 40% with people of equal skill (for fun) and 20% with people of higher skill (to check your ego and expose holes in your game).**

2. Learn to play guard before you learn escapes

Let me talk about another issue in BJJ where the 40/40/20 rule applies: what areas of BJJ to focus on first.

As a rule of thumb, I recommend you spend 40% of your time on playing guard, 40% of your time on your top game (passing, pinning & submissions from top), and 20% of your time on escapes.

This rule of thumb has a few good features to it.

If you follow this rule you spend 60% of your time on bottom positions and 40% on top positions. That's good because bottom positions are naturally harder to learn than top positions.

And you also spend more time on your guard than on your escapes. This is very important, because **you must have a guard before you can escape**. Logically. Because if you don't have a guard, then every 'escape' you do will only lead to you getting passed again immediately. So you didn't really escape anything.

I'll say it again because it's so important. **In order to escape, you must have a safe place to escape towards.** And that place is your guard. So first build your guard, then learn to escape towards it.

3. Make a practical choice between gi and no gi

Beginners almost always want to know whether they should do gi or no gi. Here's the truth.

Gi and no gi BJJ are very similar. Although there are endless small differences to explore between them, they're still both jiu jitsu. And the bottom line is that if you do either for 1 year, you can easily beat untrained people at both.

By the way, I often get push back on this point from friends that are firmly in camp gi or in camp no gi. They want to tell me that the sports are completely different and that you could be a white belt in one and a black belt in the other.

I think a helpful comparison here is **ice skating and inline skating**: yes there is a big difference. But most of the movements are very similar. Other examples would be American football vs rugby and grass court tennis vs hard court tennis. Yes, they're different (but not nearly as different as tennis vs rugby).

Within the BJJ community we like to exaggerate our differences to make ourselves stand out - but in reality we're more similar than we're different.

My advice is to do both gi and no gi if you can (so that you don't become dependent on either), but otherwise choose whichever is more practical for you. If the gym that's closest to where you live only offers either, I would just pick that one. It really doesn't matter that much which you do.

4. Go less hard in sparring than you do now

You can roll as hard as you want. But how hard you roll should not prevent you from trying out new things. **And to be honest, you're probably rolling too hard right now.**

There's a common trap with people that roll hard: they get very defensive. They don't want anything to happen except the thing they're going for. So not a lot happens. Rolling hard in a defensive way therefore ends up being a waste of everyone's time.

It's much better if a lot happens in a roll, because both people are firing off many techniques and engaging with each other's techniques. Although you *can* still make a lot happen if you're rolling hard, it's usually more difficult,

So you should roll as hard as you can while also still engaging and not being afraid to fail so you can try all your techniques.

5. The mental work makes you better much faster

John Danaher, the legendary BJJ and MMA coach, was once asked why his students improve so much quicker than everybody else. He said:

> "Everybody wants to train hard in the gym, but nobody wants to do hard mental work. Everybody likes to do hard rolls, but nobody wants to sit down and figure out why a technique doesn't work. **Everybody likes sweating, nobody likes studying.**"

Of course John's right.

Now, I don't want you to exaggerate this either - I don't want you to only sit down and talk about techniques. You do actually have to get your repetitions in.

But one thing that almost nobody does is analyze their sparring rounds after they happen. This is probably the best thing you can do to get better. And I have a useful tool for this later in this chapter.

And **not enough people study techniques at home** - though I know *you* do, because you're reading the Map. This gives you a massive advantage. At the gym you can only study BJJ for a few hours per week, but at home you're in complete control over how much you study.

So let me talk about how you get the most out of your study time. Let's talk about *who* to listen to and *where* to get their content.

6. These are the BJJ teachers you should trust

You can waste a lot of time listening to bad teachers in BJJ. I know I did.

When I was a white belt I watched a YouTube channel that only discussed ridiculous submission moves that never work, such as the gogoplata, twister and calf slicer. So I spent most of my time training those moves. Huge waste of time.

To help you avoid this pitfall I put together a list of the best BJJ teachers that focus on good moves and explain them well.

These are not the only good teachers, but they're my favorites and **if you only listen to these teachers you can learn everything you need to know to become a blue belt in BJJ**.

Here's the list.

Teacher	Specialty
Lachlan Giles	Everything
John Danaher	Everything
Gordon Ryan	Everything
Craig Jones	MMA-applicable grappling, leg locks, pins
Mikey Musumeci	Guards, berimbolos
Jon Thomas	Guards & guard retention
Chewjitsu	Philosophy & lifestyle

Lachlan Giles

Lachlan Giles is my favorite BJJ instructor. He explains techniques very clearly, and he has good details about all positions. Whenever I have a problem with a technique I go to him first.

His instructionals are the best organized and most elaborate. I also like how he doesn't just tell you the technique, but also shows how you can practice it. And I love his courses platform, **Submeta**, which has grown into the best structured way to learn BJJ online. More about it in the next section.

John Danaher

John Danaher is a great instructor. He knows a lot about every position in BJJ.

However, he talks a lot, quite slowly and he's been known to repeat himself. He can honestly be hard to listen to. So here's how I deal with John Danaher.

I only buy John Danaher instructionals about topics that I know very little about. Because **John will explain *everything*.** Which is good if you don't know anything. But it can be annoying if you already know most of the things he's saying.

For example, I bought his leg lock instructional back when I didn't know anything about leg locks, and I found every minute fascinating. And I bought instructional about takedowns, I skipped the parts that I knew already, and I got a lot from that dvd too.

Gordon Ryan

Gordon Ryan is the best grappler of all time (he won both ADCC 2024 superfights, one of them 21-0) and his instructionals are great too. Especially the more recent ones. Gordon became a better grappler and a much better teacher over the years. And now there's just nobody that has the same technical knowledge as him. One warning: he's also by far the most expensive instructor out there, so wait for sales or be picky.

Craig Jones

I know some people think Craig Jones is a 'clown' (and he kind of is), but I've really come to like his instructionals. He has a lot of content that focuses on grappling that also works in MMA, which is very interesting to me. He also always brings new techniques to the table that you can't learn anywhere else, his instructions are very clear, and I actually like his lame jokes. So he's among my absolute favorites right now. Since I first wrote this, Craig started his own million-dollar tournament (the CJI) to pressure ADCC into paying athletes more. Still a clown. Also one of the most important people in the sport now.

Jon Thomas

Jon Thomas is great for guard retention and training mindset. His YouTube channel is full of long form videos that are like mini instructionals. He also has a platform where he sells courses. And he has a great audio course on BJJ mental models, which I will talk about later in this chapter.

Chewjitsu

I'm forever grateful to Chewjitsu because **Chewy made a special video for me** years ago, when I was still a white belt. It's one of the earliest videos he did on his channel. You can still find it on his channel, it's called 'What is a Good Mindset for BJJ Competitions?'.

Chewy explained his mindset, which is not relaxed, not aggressive, but instead focussed on yourself and the beauty of your art. The answer didn't immediately help me at the time, but it's exactly the attitude that I adopted over the years.

So follow this guy for all your questions about BJJ philosophy and lifestyle!

Honorable mentions

I think the above instructors are the most important ones, but I want to shout out a few others.

Dominique Bell makes great posts on instagram, and he's also a judo black belt so you can follow him for takedowns.

Shintaro Higashi is by far my favorite channel about takedowns though. He's a judoka, but he explains the principle behind judo, which apply to BJJ as well.

Mikey Musumeci is fantastic for detailed instructionals. His Berimbolo series is over 32 hours. He breaks down positions very systematically though, which makes them easier to learn. He's since become a ONE and UFC Fight Pass star, so the catalog isn't growing fast, but the existing material holds up.

Priit Mihkelson is the defense specialist. His turtle and defensive-posture systems are the first thing I'd show anyone who feels like they're drowning in sparring. Jozef Chen is the new-generation pick: he grew up learning from instructionals and it shows in how clearly he teaches.

7. These are the places where you can get legit BJJ content

Now that we know which BJJ teachers to trust, let's talk about where to get their best content.

Submeta: my favorite course platform

Submeta is the best place to learn BJJ online. Lachlan Giles, my favorite BJJ teacher, teaches structured courses from fundamentals to advanced positions.

And the courses are more sophisticated than just 'watch these videos and learn'. There are also quizzes that break up the content to test whether you really absorbed the information.

And on the platform it's clear which courses go together well. Some courses have preliminaries, so that you know which courses you should complete before taking this one.

I really think that this platform provides a much better learning experience than any other.

Try BJJMORE only if checkout accepts it. Check the Submeta review and checkout terms before subscribing; no particular discount is guaranteed.

BJJ Mental Models: get custom tips by black belts

BJJ Mental Models has audio courses and a community. Personal sparring-video feedback requires a coaching plan: Coaching starts at $50/month with 1-2 reviews.

That you can send in videos of yourself for review is mind blowing to me. I did this, and the feedback I got was so helpful. Basically, **the black belt that analyzed my instantly saw my biggest mistake**, and pointed out every single time that I made it. (So much so that it became painful to watch myself repeat the same mistake over and over - but what a great tip!)

The audio courses are great too. They're not about techniques (because you can't show anything), but about mental models and general concepts. So they're more about topics like **mindset, alternating your rhythm during sparring, what to drill and what not to drill**, and so forth.

You can try the code MAX (my name) at checkout. Check the current terms before subscribing; do not assume a particular discount or trial is available.

BJJ Fanatics: the largest instructional library

BJJ Fanatics has **the biggest collection of BJJ instructionals on the internet**. Almost everybody you know has a course on it. The quality is high - especially if you follow the teachers I recommended in the previous section

How BJJ Fanatics works is that teachers make an instructional about a **specific topic**. So if you're looking for something specific, you can almost always find a high quality instructor who talks about it there.

YouTube: a double edged sword

YouTube can be a great resource - or a terrible one.

It's great because it's **the biggest resource, and it's completely free**. But big and free are also its unique disadvantages.

Big is a disadvantage because there's too much. Many YouTube teachers are bad, it's hard to tell who's good (fortunately I told you who's good in the last section!), and even the good people contradict each other all the time.

You're usually better off following one program than to let the YouTube algorithm guide your curriculum. **If you try to follow too many different instructors at the same time, you might be trying to put puzzle pieces together that don't fit with each other**.

Free can also be a disadvantage because it forces creators to give viewers what they want, not what they need. So **there's a bias towards moves that get interest, rather than moves that work**.

For example, creators on Youtube mostly answer the most common questions (how to escape mount, how to escape side control, etc.), rather than teaching a complete defensive system that starts with a guard, then frames and guard retention, and *then* escapes.

Instagram and TikTok: great for entertainment, not for learning

Instagram and TikTok have a lot of BJJ on them. And **it's obviously fun to watch BJJ clips, but let's face it - this is not the best way to learn**. It's very unorganized, and by the time you're done you already forgot most of what you saw. And Insta and TikTok also have a tendency to promote flashy moves more than effective moves. So let's use them for entertainment, not for learning.

Chapter 2: Guards

Guards are very important in jiu jitsu. It's how you defend yourself off your back. And how to win fights off your back too. It's the founding idea of BJJ.

There are many different guards (but maybe less than you think) and they're all very different. That's why it's very important to choose which one to learn first.

Here's an overview of each guard, what it's good for and approximately how long it takes to learn (as in, before you can use it effectively against other white belts).

Guard	What it's good for	How long to learn
Single x guard	Sweeps & submissions	2 weeks
Half guard (with knee shield)	Defense & Transitions	3 weeks
Closed guard	Defense & sweeps	1 month
Butterfly guard	Sweeps	2 months
X guard	Sweeps	1 month
Collar sleeve (gi only)	Submissions	3 weeks
Worm guard (and other lapel guards) (gi only)	Defense & sweeps	5 weeks
De la riva guard	Sweeps	3 months
Reverse de la riva	Defense & spin unders	4 months
Shin to shin guard	Leg entries	3 months

K guard	Leg entries	2 months
Deep half guard	Sweeps	3 months
Spider guard (gi only)	Defense & submissions	3 months
Octopus guard	Scrambles & back takes	4 months

Single x guard

Single x guard is very easy to learn for beginners. Usually people can get the basic single x sweep in sparring directly after learning it. And after that sweep you can immediately attack the footlock and win fights quickly.

You may have to fight a little bit to get to this guard position. If possible you should try to pull directly to single x guard from the standing position, and otherwise you get a second chance to go to it from knee shield half guard.

Half guard (with knee shield)

Knee shield half guard is the easiest guard to defend with for beginners. The knee shield is just super strong. It's very hard to pass, even for blue and purple belts.

The drawback of the knee shield is that it's very defensive, and you can't immediately attack from it. But that's why you'll try to transition to single leg x guard from here, which is a very strong offensive position.

Closed guard

Closed guard is decent for beginners because it's a fairly static position. It's hard for people to break out off. However, it can also be hard to get anything going from bottom. As soon as people know what you're doing, it's easy for them to defend it. So beginners often get stuck in closed guard. It's still a good option for beginners, but I think the knee shield half guard is even better.

Butterfly guard

Butterfly guard is dynamic, and therefore quite hard for beginners. If you don't react quickly, your opponent can just jump over your leg and pass you immediately. The upside is that the sweeps come just as quickly from this position. Still, I don't think it's the most suitable guard for beginners.

X guard

X guard is a reasonably easy guard to play. It's more open than single leg x guard, which makes the chance bigger that you get passed quickly. But you also have more options to sweep. It's definitely a good idea to add x guard to your game after you learn the single x guard.

Collar sleeve

Collar sleeve guard guard has a simple game plan. As long as you can keep tension on the collar and your foot on the bicep, you're threatening quick triangles and omoplata. And against lower belts it's even a decent position to chill because it's hard for them to immediately start passing when you're pulling their posture down so much. So if you want to start working your open guard, I would start with collar sleeve.

Worm guard (and other lapel guards)

The worm guard is actually pretty easy to play for beginners, *if* you can get into it. The same is true for the reverse de la worm, the Polish worm Rider, and other lapel guards. This is because these guards are all very tied down so the movement is limited and you get time to work in the position. But the obvious downside is that they don't exist in no gi grappling, so if you want to become good at both, you're not using your time as efficiently as possible.

De la riva guard

De la riva guard is a very open guard, so there's a lot going on. If you're a beginner it's easy to get either of your legs pushed down and end up in a bad position. But there are also a few easy sweeps from de la riva, such as the tripod sweep and the sweep where you just kick out their back leg. So it's a hard guard for beginners but you might find some early success with it.

Reverse de la riva guard

Reverse de la riva is a hard no-no for beginners. It's a terribly hard position. It revolves around spinning under your opponent, which is hard to do and leaves you open to many counters.

Of course, you can get forced into reverse de la riva if your opponent knee slides and you have to stop it. But your goal is to get out to a different guard again quickly.

Shin to shin guard

Shin to shin guard is position you can use as a first point of contact. People use it more in no gi, because it leads to leg entanglements. As a beginner, this is seductive because it leads directly to single x, which is where you want to be.

But the problem is that if you don't keep your opponent's knee exactly in the middle of your chest, they automatically fall either into a knee slide or a 3 quarter mount. And there's also the risk of guillotines while you're still seated. So I wouldn't play this guard as a beginner.

K guard

K guard is a position popularized by Lachlan Giles. He uses it to get to backside 50/50 and other leg entanglements, as well as backtakes.

K guard itself is relatively easy to play, but the follow ups are complicated. You might find yourself hanging upside down on your opponent's leg unsure what to do next. Entering backside 50/50 is actually not as easy for you as it is for Lachlan. And matrix-style backtakes are also hard. So it's not a beginner friendly guard.

Deep half guard

Deep half guard is a very hard guard to play. If you're a beginner, there's a big chance that you get yourself stuck in Mount or even in a mounted triangle. I would not recommend starting with this guard unless you have a lot of wrestling experience.

Spider guard

Spider guard is hard. It's also so a guard that almost nobody plays anymore. At least you don't see people with both of their feet on both of their opponents biceps for a long time nowadays. It's much more common to put one foot on one bicep while your other foot is doing something else (such as in collar sleeve guard and tarantula guard).

Octopus guard

Octopus guard is technically more a scramble position you pass through than a guard you hold: you wrap an arm over your opponent's back and chase a sweep or back take before they can settle. It's fairly hard, so treat it as a fun extra, not a foundation.

Quiz

Here's some quick questions to test your knowledge of this chapter. If you don't know an answer, simply go back and find it in the chapter.

- From which guard can you immediately sweep and attack a footlock?
- Which guard is generally easier to play for beginners, knee shield half guard or reverse de la riva?
- Which guard is better for sweeps, collar sleeve guard or deep half guard?

Instructional tips

There's many instructionals that you can use to continue your study of guards in BJJ, including many detailed instructionals about every individual guard that I mentioned above. Here I'll mention a few instructionals about playing guard in general. My top tips for my 3 favorite course platforms are:

1. Foundations II: Guard by Lachlan Giles on Submeta (subscription required).

2. **Guard retention** by Jon Thomas on BJJ Mental Models
3. **The ultimate guard bundle** by Gordon Ryan on BJJ Fanatics - this is a very big bundle, rather than one general instructional

Chapter 3: Guard passes

Passing guard is probably the easiest part of BJJ for beginners - but that doesn't mean you'll find all guard passes easy. Or useful, for that matter. Some guard passes only really work against higher belts who are doing the 'proper' defense. So at the beginner level there's a lot of passes that you don't even need yet.

So I'll list all guard passes, and I'll talk about which are easy and which you need to pass beginners.

But first I should explain exactly what I mean when I say 'a guard pass'. And for that I have to explain the 3 steps of guard passing.

The free chapters stop here.

Want the full BJJ Map?

The full guide continues with guard passes, pins, pin escapes, leg entanglements, submissions, takedowns, and the simple white-belt game plan that ties the map together.

Read the full BJJ Map

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side knee cut, and you stabilize the position.

The disentangling phase is simple (though not easy): you break the grips that they want. The stabilize phase can be scrambly, but it's generally the easiest phase.

The pass the legs phase has the most variety to it. There's many different ways to pass the legs, whether you go around them, through them, over them or under them. The table below shows all guard passes you can choose from with an indication for how long they take to learn.

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