

FIRST LIGHT VIDEO PUBLISHING

TIPS FOR TEACHERS AND PERFORMERS

A STUDY GUIDE

Unarmed Stage Combat I: Learning The Basics

F1179DVD

DVD Index

This educational study guide is designed to be used in conjunction with the DVD Unarmed Stage Combat I: Learning the Basics.

The following DVD index coincides with the chapter numbers on the main menu on your television screen, as well as the contents of this study guide. Use this key to jump ahead, or review a section, or to locate a particular technique and/or obtain material presented to you in one of the “*tricks of the trade*” sessions.

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Up Tempo Student Fight

The following section is meant to assist teachers and performers when practicing the techniques in this DVD. It may be helpful for teachers to read aloud the information presented to performers both in this next section as well as the additional notes on helpful tips that occur throughout this study guide.

TIPS FOR TEACHERS

1. Refer to DVD page # 2 Getting Ready and Chapter 2 of this study guide to help you and your performers prepare themselves for a safe and enjoyable stage combat rehearsal.
2. Always begin the rehearsal of practice session by having the students select a partner. You may or may not want to assist them in this process depending on the age and experience of the students. It is not important for them to partner with a person of the same sex, but it may be easier to learn the techniques with a partner approximately the same height and weight.
3. Arrange the rehearsal space so that every performer can be seen at all times. This will assist you in coaching them through each of the techniques.
4. Always rehearse in slow motion. By example, set the ideal slow motion tempo and have them practice it along with you. Also demonstrate what it means for everyone to work at the same tempo.
5. Divide the performers up into two groups and alternate the practice session if you have too many performers for the size of the room. Each performer should be able to move about freely in all directions for several feet before running into a fellow performer.
6. Organize the performers so that all partner A's face the same direction and all B's face the same direction. Never have two people playing the same part work back to back because it will cause unnecessary traffic problems once they begin moving about the space.
7. Don't try to accomplish too much or too little in practice session. Rushing the learning process can be dangerous and frustrating, and spending too much time on one technique can cause the performers to lose interest.
8. If you are using a television and the DVD during class, make sure that you allow the students to view each lesson several times before getting it on its feet. Use the pause, or frame by frame button to highlight details.

The following section is meant to assist teachers and performers when practicing the techniques in this DVD. It may be helpful for teachers to read aloud the information presented to performers both in this next section as well as the additional notes on helpful tips that occur throughout this study guide.

TIPS FOR PERFORMERS

1. Refer to DVD page # 2 Getting Ready in the DVD and CHAPTER 2 of this study guide to help you prepare yourself and the practice space for a safe and enjoyable stage combat rehearsal.
2. Respect and take care of your partner at all times.
3. Keep on the lookout for accidents that can happen around you and your partner. Watch out for the other performers wandering around you to make sure they don't unknowingly enter your practice space.
4. Work at the same tempo as your partner whether you are working in slow motion while you learn a technique, or whether you are moving at a faster pace when you bring it up to performance speed. If you are uncertain what the tempo is, take a moment and make that decision together.
5. Respect the slower speed if two partners are working at different tempos. Everyone learns at a different rate of speed and it can be dangerous if one performer feels pressured to speed up before they are ready. Remember: STAGE COMBAT IS A TEAM EFFORT. It takes at least two people to create a stage fight.
6. Listen to each other's suggestions, especially when they come from the partner playing the victim at that time.
7. Give equal weight to what each partner says. Neither partner should work as the "teacher" or "director" unless mutually agreed upon by the partners and/or director/teacher.

1. EXPANDED TERMS SECTION

These terms help you understand the safety and movement principles that underlie all of stage combat. Understanding them will help you and your partner create the techniques in a manner that is both safe and productive.

Teachers might wish to hand out this list of terms, and/or use the list as the basis for a written quiz.

Attacker

The attacker is the combatant initiating the technique such as a punch, kick, or slap.

Victim

The victim is the combatant on the receiving end of any attack. Combatants can potentially change roles from attacker to victim many times throughout the fight.

Fight Distance

The correct spacing between you and your partner should be at least 3 to 4 feet apart. Check distance by having the taller student (the one with the longer arms) reach out toward the partner with a straight arm. The hand should be at least 6 – 8 inches from the partner's chest. This allows for maximum safety while maintaining the illusion of reality.

Breath

Remember to breathe throughout the fight no matter how much physical exertion is needed. Since breath and voice are linked, this will help you to vocalize during rehearsals and while performing fight techniques. It will also help the body to relax.

Tension Relaxation

Avoid becoming too tense when performing the fight. Excessive tension gets in the way of body control and quickly tires you out.

Eye Contact

Making eye contact prior to each and every sequence in the fight is a constant reminder to be ready and prepared for the next sequence. For example eye contact is made between the combatants before a slap is thrown to help both the attacker and victim prepare for the next move. The attacker knows the victim is ready to react and the victim knows the attacker is ready to initiate the next move. It is not necessary to maintain constant eye contact, but it is important to "check in" before each technique, and during potentially dangerous moves.

Stance and Balance

Always stand with your weight centered, your legs at least shoulder width apart, and with your knees slightly bent. This stance allows for freedom of movement in all directions. If your weight is leaning on one leg or the other, it will be hard to change directions when needed.

Cueing

The signal given from you to your partner at predetermined times throughout the fight. Cues should be choreographed into the fight at specific places to establish each other's readiness to continue. All cues are made either physically (a touch, or a push for example), vocally (a yell or grunt for example), verbally (a line from the play for example), or through eye contact.

Contact Blow

A blow delivered to a major muscle group that actually strikes the victim and produces a realistic sound. The energy of the contact punch or kick is always pulled.

Pulling the Energy

Pulling the energy of a strike means the quick withdrawal of the punching or kicking action to avoid potential injury to the victim's major muscle group.

Non-Contact

A blow delivered with the illusion of contact, a non-contact punch always misses its target by 6 – 8 inches or more.

Reverse Energy

Reverse energy is the concept of energy moving away from the attacker's target area to protect the victim. For example, when a strangulation is performed the attacker actually pulls the energy away from the victim while the victim holds the attacker's hand in place to stabilize the contact. This "reverse energy" results in a technique that is safe for the combatants.

Masking

Masking is the concept of hiding a moment of contact so that it will look as if the blow has struck its target. This is always true of non-contact blows and sometimes true of contact blows. All techniques need to mask the knap and fighting distance from the audience.

Timing

Good timing is crucial to the effectiveness of a good stage fight. Avoid anticipating the fight moves either by rushing the attack or reacting before the blow is delivered. Reacting too late also makes the fight look unrealistic.

Breaking down a punch

All punches, kicks, or slaps are made up of three parts.

- 1. The eye contact and checking of distance**
- 2. The send up or cocking of the arm, hand or foot**
- 3. The follow through of the action with simultaneous knap reaction**

2. TRICKS OF THE TRADE: GETTING READY

Preparing your work space

Work in a clear open space, gymnasium or theatre. Clear away any chairs, tables or other equipment that might injure you. Check to see if you have adequate light. Always try to practice on a wooden floor. Don't work on asphalt, cement, outside on grass that can be slippery. Use tumbling mats to cushion any accidental falls.

Rehearsal clothing

Wear loose, non-restrictive and comfortable clothing. Wear supportive and protective footwear. Avoid wearing high heels, boots, slippery shoes or socks.

Remove all jewelry such as necklaces, rings, watches, earrings, belt buckles, and cell phones.

Empty your pockets of wallets, money, keys, etc.

Selecting Partners

It's not necessary to select a partner of the same sex. It may be best to partner with someone of the same size and height.

3. THE FULL SPEED FIGHT

See DVD page 3.

4. PUSHES AND PULLS

A Small Push

Push the shoulders lightly with fingertips or backs of the fingers. The victim should give way to the attacker and react as if being pushed.

A Big Push

The attacker grabs the clothes of the victim then steps forward to keep the balance and throws themselves back. The attacker follows through extending the energy of the arms away at a 45-degree angle.

The Pull

The attacker grabs the victim's clothes and the victim grabs the attacker's wrists to stabilize both partners. The victim then uses their own energy to move forward or sideways. Be careful not to bang your heads or faces together.

Helpful tips for Pushes:

- The target areas for the push include the upper chest, the stomach and the deltoid muscle.
- Never improvise the choreography of the push or pull.
- Decide before hand where the victim will be pushed or pulled.

5. MAKING KNAPS

The knap is the sound created by the performers that simulates the moment of contact. The ability to make knaps is one of the essential requirements in all of stage combat. They are required for many non-contact punches and kicks. A successful knap should be well timed and completely masked from the audience. There are three types of knaps that are used in this DVD series:

The Clap Knap

This knap is the easiest and most common of all knaps. It's appropriately named because it is made by clapping the bottom hand to the top one. For all types of clap knaps, the palm of the moving hand (the bottom hand) meets the fingers of the stationary hand (the top hand).

Helpful tips on making Knaps:

- Avoid preparing the hands left and right therefore calling it to the audience's attention.
- Always hide the knap behind the hip area of the body.
- Practice making the smallest movement with the hands.
- Practice bringing the hands into the "ready" position at the last moment before the punch, slap, or other technique is launched.
- Practice making louder, or softer knaps depending on the speed and intention of the partner's attack.
- Finally, always remember that the palm of the rising hand strikes the fingers of the stationary hand. This will increase the odds of getting a good "pop" sound, and reduce pain in the hands.

The Slip Hand Knap

The slip hand knap is made when the attacker strikes the punching hand to the non-punching hand to create the sound of the blow.

Helpful tips on the Slip Hand Knap:

- Always start with a hand in a closed fist position.
- Open the palm of the punching hand and strike it against the fingers of the non-punching hand.
- Return the punching hand back to a fist once the knap is made.
- Pay particular attention to the trajectory of the punching hand so that it doesn't threaten the partner after hitting the stationary "knap" hand. It must still miss the partner by 6-8 inches or more.

The Shared Knap

The shared knap is made when the attacker strikes a designated part of the victim's body to create the sound of the blow. The part most often used by the victim is the hand.

See DVD page #5 for details.

Helpful tips on the Shared Knap:

- Too much forward energy on a kick or punch when making this knap can injure your partner's hands or wrists. Always pull the energy of the blow when performing a shared knap, and work hard to always strike the partners hands at the correct angle.
- The victim must prepare the hands before the attacker begins the forward motion of the kick or punch, because the attacker needs to see the victim's hands as a target.

Teachers: It is a good idea to have students practice knapping as a group, and starting from different hand positions. The knap position of the hands is a learned skill. Try having them gesture, for instance having arms folded, in pockets, or reaching out, then on a 1, 2, 3 count, have them knap and react. On count 1, have

them stop the gesture. On count 2, have them get their hands ready to knap. On count 3, have them knap and react.

6. THE STAGE SLAP

Forehand Slap (Non Contact)

Partners stand opposite each other and offset. The attacker faces downstage, the victim faces upstage. Left shoulder faces left shoulder for the forehand slap performed by right-handed performers.

1. Check distance and make eye contact
2. Wind up for the slap, with the arm bent, and the fingers facing up. The victim prepares the knap hands.
3. The attacker follows through, and the victim makes the clap knap and simultaneous reaction.

Backhand Slap (Non Contact)

Partners stand opposite each other and offset. The attacker faces downstage, the victim faces upstage. Right shoulder faces your partner's right shoulder for performers who are throwing a right handed backhand slap.

1. Check distance and make eye contact
2. Wind up for the slap, bending the arm, and twisting the torso slightly. The victim prepares the knap hands.
3. The attacker follows through and the victim makes the clap knap and simultaneous reaction.

Helpful tips about the Stage Slap:

- Make sure the reaction of the head, and body equals the size, speed, and simulated weight of the slap.
- Always mask the knap from the audience.
- The head always moves in the same direction as the slap.

7. TRICKS OF THE TRADE: “REHEARSING FIGHTS”

- Always rehearse in slow motion. Gradually increase speed.
- Work out each detail with your partner to achieve maximum effect.
- Break the fight into small sections, and learn each one before going on to the next part.
- Never try to learn too much in one rehearsal.
- Check your distance constantly and work at the same tempo.
- Increase the tempo gradually after learning each section.
- Take breaks at hourly intervals.
- Take notes! Write down observations, and the teachers tips on each technique. If you are stringing sequences together, write down the fight so that both partners can study it between rehearsals or classes.

The Right Hook (Non Contact)

Partners stand facing each other's left shoulder. Attackers face downstage, victims face upstage.

1. Make eye contact and check distance.
2. Wind up over the right shoulder and the victim prepares the knap with the left hand on bottom and the right hand on top.
3. The attacker follows through and the victim reacts with simultaneous head reaction in the same direction as the punch. Always miss the victim by 6 – 8 inches or more when punching with speed and power.

The Left Hook (Non Contact)

Partners stand facing each other's right shoulder. Attackers face downstage, victims face upstage.

1. Make eye contact and check distance.
2. Wind up over the left shoulder and the victim prepares the knap with the left hand on top of the right hand.
3. Attacker follows through and victim reacts with simultaneous head reaction in the same direction as the punch.

Helpful tips on Punches:

- Stand farther away for more powerful punches. The fist should never be closer than 6 – 8 inches from the partner, and for powerful punches even farther, 10 to 14 inches.
- Victims should remember to vocalize the pain a split second after the knap, so the audience hears the knap, then the vocal reaction, never both together.

9. STAGING FALLS

Helpful Tips on Falls:

- Always work on mats that provide adequate protection from the hard floor surface and remember that the person falling always controls the energy of any fall.
- Exhale throughout the technique.
- Always lower yourself toward the floor using the leg muscles.
- Never use the hands to catch the full weight of the body!

The Back Fall

1. Bring your arms forward to counter balance the fall.
2. Take a large step backward with the right or left leg turning it out at the same time (decide before hand which leg is going to step back).
3. Approach the floor in a controlled manner and sit back on the leg by counter balancing your weight forward.

- When you approach the floor, cheat your weight to the opposite side buttock and roll down that side of your body. NEVER ROLL DOWN YOUR SPINE. Keep your chin tucked and breath throughout the fall. Practice slowly.

The Front Fall

- Step forward and slightly out to the side with the right or left leg. (Decide before hand which leg is going to step forward).
- The arms reach out in front to prepare for the landing.
- Using your legs, lower yourself to the floor so that you're only falling 12 inches or less.
- Lower yourself to the floor catching yourself with your hands.

10. TRICKS OF THE TRADE: “STAGING FIGHTS”

When staging punches, slaps or kicks in a proscenium theatre, the partners are best positioned upstage to downstage at the moment of the punch, or slap. Placing them stage left and right of each other limits your possibilities and opens up the tricks to the audience.

Thrust stages, and theatre in the round, further limit your options to very short fights that rely on contact moves, missed punches, and struggling.

Always take time to write down the choreography and make sure everyone has copies of the notation.

Don't forget logic and character choice when creating the choreography. The fight must fit within the structure of the play and move the story line along. Consult with the director, the scene designer, the costume designer and all other personnel to help you create the safest and most appropriate fight for both the actors who must perform it, and the production as a whole.

More information on this can be found on DVD III, CHAPTER 4.

11. PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER: UP TEMPO STUDENT FIGHT

Partner A faces upstage.

Partner B faces downstage.

They stand opposite each other right shoulder to right shoulder.

- A: Initiates small push to B's right shoulder.
- B: Reacts, then replies with a small right hand slap, followed by a medium sized push with both hands to both shoulders.
- A: Does clap knap and reacts to slap. Reacts to the push, then steps in and grabs clothes.
- B: Grabs A's wrists to stabilize the position.
- A: Pulls B around 180 degrees to the right, then initiates big pull cue in preparation to do the push.
- B: Follows pull by stepping forward on left leg, then throws himself back on the push.

- A: Pushes B extending the energy 45 degrees away from the body.
- B: Steps back left, right, and performs a sit down back fall. Slight pause to recover. Gets up, being careful not to advance into distance, turns upstage and prepares to make clap knap.
- A: Cues and hits with a right hook then a left hook.
- B: Reacts and clap knaps both then steps to the left on the last punch clearing stage for A to step forward (A should be facing downstage).
- A: Begins to walk downstage past B.
- B: Places right hand on A's right shoulder and initiates a push turn, and while pushing turns at same time to face downstage, coming into position slightly off line (line up shoulder to shoulder).
- A: Pivots to the right, ends up facing upstage and prepares to clap knap.
- B: Cues back and hits A with a left hook, then a right hook.
- A: Reacts and clap knaps both, turn to the right with a reaction to the previous punch, and steps strongly on the left leg and performs a front fall to the floor exhaling at the same time.

Helpful Tips When Acting Fights:

- Make sure you finish each move of the fight before you move on the next one.
- Remember: full performance speed is always $\frac{3}{4}$ tempo, even though you might be able to go faster!
- Vocal warm ups should be done in advance to help keep the throat in good condition.
- React vocally when receiving any punch or kick.
- Be careful of vocally overplaying each reaction so that the fight sounds unrealistic.
- Play the pain of each attack and don't forget it as you progress throughout the fight.
- Take care of each other throughout the fight.
- Stay in character, step back and collect your thoughts if you forget the fight.

LIST OF THE COMPLETE UNARMED STAGE COMBAT DVD LIBRARY CONTENTS

LIST OF TERMS FOR ALL THREE DVDS

Attacker	Cueing
Victim	Contact
Fighting Distance	Non-contact
Breathing	Pulling the Energy
Tension Relaxation	Reverse Energy
Eye Contact	Timing
Stance	Breaking Down a Punch
Balance	

TECHNIQUES CONTAINED IN EACH DVD

DVD 1: Learning the Basics

Push	Back Hand Slap
Pull	Right Hook
Clap Knap	Left Hook
Slip Hand Knap	Back Fall
Shared Knap	Front Fall
Forehand Slap	

Tricks of the Trade:

Getting Ready
Staging Fights
Rehearsing Fights

DVD 2: Perfecting the Fundamentals

Wrist Grab w/Release	Non-contact Stomach Punch
Arm Lock behind Back	Uppercut w/ Clap Knap
Push Away	Strangle Hold w/Break
Clothes Grab w/ Break	Hair Pull
Right Hook	Crescent Kick
Left Hook	Knee Drop
Duck	

Tricks of the Trade:

Acting and Intention
Partnering
Safety
Performance Anxiety and Stage Fright

DVD 3: Mastering the Techniques

Backhand Slap	Uppercut w/Slip Hand Knap
Choke from Behind	Contact Stomach Punch
Elbow Strike	Straight Right w/ Slip Hand Knap
Push	Kick to stomach with Shared Knap
Clothes Grab with Break	Knee Drop
Left Hook	Right Hook
Block	

Tricks of the Trade:

Value of Striking and Reactions
The Fight Captain
Fight Calls
Padding

LIST OF THE MOST WIDELY PRODUCED MODERN PLAYS AND MUSICALS WITH FIGHTS

COMEDIES

Bus Stop	Jumpers
Black Comedy	Lend Me a Tenor
Cloud Nine	Mr. Roberts
A Couple of White Chicks	The Nerd
Sitting Around Talking	Noises Off
A Cry of Players	Picnic
Digby	Playboy of The Western World
Entertaining Mr. Sloan	Private Lives
Escape From Happiness	Ring Round the Moon
The Fifth of July	Scapino
The Foreigner	Stalag 17
Geniuses	Trapper Tanzi
The Good Doctor	What The Butler Saw
The House of Blue Leaves	

DRAMA

American Buffalo	Cat on a Hot Tin Roof
And They Dance Real Slow In Jackson	The Changing Room
Ma Rainey's Black Bottom	Cowboy Mouth
Aunt Dan and Lemon	Curse of the Starving Class
The Ballad of the Sad Café	Danny & the Deep Blue Sea
Bent	Dark of the Moon
Blood Knot	Death of a Salesman
Buried Child	The Diary of Anne Frank
Bus Stop	Deathwatch
	Dracula

Edmund	A View from the Bridge
The Elephant Man	Who's Afraid of Virginia
Equus	Woolf?
Extremities	Woyzeck
Fences	Zoo Story
Find Your Way Home	
Fool for Love	
Frankenstein	
Golden Boy	
The Great White Hope	
A Hatful of Rain	
The Hostage	
I'm Not Rappaport	
An Indian Wants the Bronx	
A Lie of the Mind	
The Love of the Nightengale	
The Lieutenant of Innishmore	
The Mad Forest	
Look Back in Anger	
The Lonesome West	
The Maids	
Modigliani	
A Moon for the Misbegotten	
My Sister in This House	
National Anthems	
No Place to be Somebody	
Of Fortune in Men's Eyes	
Of Mice and Men	
Oleanna	
Orphans	
The Piano Lesson	
Picnic	
Pillowman	
Requiem for a Heavyweight	
The Rimers of Eldridge	
Scheherazade	
Search and Destroy	
Short Eyes	
A Sleep of Prisoners	
A Soldier's Story	
Splendor in the Grass	
Sticks and Bones	
Streamers	
A Streetcar Named Desire	
The Tooth of Crime	
True West	

MYSTERY THRILLERS

The Bad Seed
Corpse
Dark at the Top of the Stairs
Deathtrap
Dial M for Murder

Murderer
Sleuth
Sorry, Wrong Number
Wait Until Dark
Write Me a Murder

MUSICALS

Brigadoon
Cabaret
Carpusel
Chicago
City of Angels
Diamond Studs
The Fantastiks
Guys and Dolls
Man of La Mancha

Oklahoma
Peter Pan
Pippin
Pump Boys and Dinettes
The Robber Bridegroom
Shenandoah
Sweeney Todd
The Three Penny Opera
West Side Story

A note from the Creative Team:

We hope you enjoyed, and found these DVD's useful and informative. If you are interested in finding out more about stage combat, and training opportunities, please visit: www.safd.org

J. Allen Suddeth

FIRST LIGHT VIDEO PUBLISHING

2321 Abbot Kinney Blvd.
Venice, CA 90291

To Order Call: 310-577-8581 Fax: 310-574-0886

Email: sale@firstlightvideo.com

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