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## Passing the guard

One of the most distinctive features of Brazilian jiu-jitsu is the extensive use of the “guard” position. Used intelligently, the guard position can allow a smaller man to control, frustrate, and finish a bigger, stronger opponent from a bottom position. Your opponent holds you in his guard when he has you positioned between both his legs. If his legs are wrapped around your waist and his feet crossed behind your back, he has you in a “closed guard.” Inexperienced ground fighters generally assume that when they are held in someone’s guard they have a superior position, given that they are on top. In fact this is not the case. By holding the person between his legs the man on bottom has considerable control over the top man. From there he can employ a great many submission holds and strikes. In addition he can frustrate the attempts of the top man to strike him. Due to the difficulty of attacking a person who is using the guard position against you, it is generally best to break out of the guard and get to a better posi-

tion from where you have a far better chance of striking or submitting your opponent. This task of getting around the opponent’s legs to a better position is referred to as “passing the guard.” *It is a crucial skill for the grappler to learn.* Given the overall strategy of seeking a better position from which to dominate and submit the opponent, this skill is of paramount importance. To be sure, there are some submission attacks you can employ while held up in someone’s guard; most of them are attacks to the opponent’s legs, but in general passing the guard is the strategy to follow.

There are a great many ways to pass the guard. The method shown here is one of the most basic. This method has certain limitations that will be discussed, but it remains one of the best ways to teach beginners the fundamental skills required to pass the guard. The crucial skill that it develops is that of “stacking” the opponent as a prelude to passing his guard.



1

Royler has Renzo locked in his closed guard. Renzo does not want to stay here since he can be attacked with many different submission holds. Renzo begins by sitting up straight and placing his hands upon Royler’s biceps. By immobilizing Royler’s arms, Renzo can make it difficult for Royler to attack with chokes, locks, and strikes. Renzo maintains good posture. His back is straight, head up.



2

Renzo posts his left leg out wide and turns his hips a little toward the left. He keeps his head up and back straight. By turning his hips a little, Renzo opens up a narrow space between his left inner thigh and Royler’s right inner thigh.



3

Renzo passes his left hand through this small gap and pushes his left arm through so that it is deep under Royler’s right leg. Renzo is sure to sink his level down as he passes his left hand through the gap. By lowering his hips he keeps his base strong. It would be difficult for Royler to sweep him over. Note that while in this position Renzo is somewhat vulnerable to being struck in the face by Royler’s right hand. This is the first limitation of this guard-passing method, a limitation that makes it less appropriate for a no-rules fight.



Sometimes it can be tough to create a sufficiently large gap through which to pass your hand. You want to avoid leaning over, out of balance, in a frantic attempt to dig your hand into the gap. By doing so you expose yourself to the danger of being swept over by your opponent.





4

Sometimes you are confronted by an opponent with immensely strong legs. It can be very difficult to break his feet apart. Rather than struggle and strain against his strength, grab your left shin close to the ankle with your left hand and shuffle your left foot away from yourself. Do not step with your left foot as this will destroy your balance. Simply shuffle it out; your foot never leaves the floor. This will break apart the feet of even the strongest opponent.



5

Renzo has shuffled his left foot out wide, breaking Royler's feet apart and putting him in a great position to pass the guard. The key detail to note here is that Renzo has put himself in a position where his left *shoulder* is under Royler's right thigh. This is very important. It is *not enough* to merely get your bicep under the thigh and lift with the strength of your arm. You must get down low and hoist your opponent's thigh up onto your shoulder. This will give you tremendous power to drive forward and pass. Lifting with the arm alone is tiring and ineffective, as it allows a skilled opponent to scoot his hips out to the side and attack you.



6

Having gotten his shoulder under Royler's thigh, Renzo reaches with his left hand to grip Royler's left lapel. Grab with the thumb inside the collar, fingers outside, palm down to the floor. A deep grip is desirable. If your opponent is not wearing a gi, grip his left shoulder at the trapezius muscle. An experienced opponent will very often use the *triangle choke* at this point (the triangle choke is covered in another section). This is a definite danger. Renzo can counter this danger by pulling his right elbow back tight to Royler's right hip. This immobilizes Royler's hips and makes the triangle choke rather difficult to perform.



7

Drive with the strength of your legs to bring your opponent's knee up to his nose. This movement is referred to as "stacking." It is a very important concept in passing the guard. By stacking your opponent you prevent him from being able to attack you or even defending himself. It is an uncomfortable position for the man on bottom.



8

Once Renzo has brought Royler's knee up to his nose in a tight stacking position, he walks around to Royler's right side and drives forward with his hips and stomach to clear Royler's legs out of the way. He now finds himself past the legs and lying across Royler's side in an excellent position.



9

Renzo further secures his position by placing his right hand on the floor next to Royler's left hip. This is a simple means of preventing Royler from bringing his right knee in and putting him back in the guard position. Renzo places his left elbow on the floor next to Royler's left ear. This affords him excellent control of his opponent's head. By pulling his left elbow tight toward his left hip Renzo makes movement and escape very difficult for the bottom man.

Beginners often are in a rush to perform the movements required to pass the guard. There is no great hurry. Slow the movements down and concentrate on a slow and deliberate stacking motion that shuts down your opponent's defense. Before you even attempt stacking your opponent, make sure your shoulder is deep under his thigh, not merely resting on your bicep.