

# Class Structure

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## **Introduction**

A 'Lesson Plan' should not be rigid, but flexible for the level and type of student, and time available. It needs to be adjusted according to need on the fly, for example when you find out that all your senior students have the flu, the class is otherwise full and you just got 9 people starting that night. I have had this happen. However, although flexible, class needs to have structure as structure helps the students learn, students get familiar with the routine and this reduces your workload, and a familiar routine keeps the pace going for the students even when you can't monitor each individual directly. This article is a suggestion on how things can be made more clearly functional. It is how it is done in our school, which is closely based on what my sifu does in his normal classes, except that his classes were much longer.

The class is usually about two hours long, which is not much time to do everything. It is usually divided roughly into half hour sections, and each half hour section (after the first exercise and form section) approximately divided into two fifteen minute brackets, or 3 ten minute brackets if there are a lot of beginners. These are where the students change partners. For advanced classes, twenty minute or half hour brackets are more useful for the students to explore chi sau more with a single partner. Students should attempt to train with everyone in the class at least once, or at least train with a different person every partner change if the class is larger. This enables the students to experience as many different 'hands' as possible, a vital point in training. Traditionally, it is said that students need to have at least a dozen people doing free chi sau with them for them to learn enough different "hands" to be effective. At least one third to half the enrolled students attend every lesson in order for the school to be a vital school. Smaller schools and private classes or students do not get enough of this experience. Too large a school, of course, does not get enough attention per student from the sifu, unless there are many senior people regularly involved with the junior students. This proportion should be quite high. Therefore the most effective schools are from about half a dozen to a dozen students per class to a maximum of two dozen people per class, with an average enrolment of about 25 or 30 active over the month. Quite small.

It is a nice idea if the school is open a half hour early and remains open a half hour or an hour after class, to enable keen or advanced students time for extra practice, especially chi sau, or dummy practice, and their own training and interests. For longer classes, the middle sections are usually increased. With my sifu, many of our classes were 3 or 4 hours, and some were 7 hours long. Each division was made longer, rather than changes made overall. Exercises often took 40 minutes, with a 20 minute form, and punching at the end often took 20 minutes or half an hour. The middle hours were mostly following the same plan as given just longer before each change of partner, or more changes.

Each student should move through the entire of their training each practice session, from the beginning to the end. In two our sessions, advanced students often need to come in early or stay late to have enough time to do so.

Traditionally, training sessions didn't have a defined start or end, and the teacher didn't always stay there the whole time. It was up to the student to go through the training himself, diligently and efficiently, covering all their training to date. If the student didn't do that, they were largely left alone to pick up their own information. If the student was a self-starter, then the teacher would advance them more often, and reward them for doing more work by giving them ... more work. I still run at least one class (and usually two, both on the weekend) per week in this manner, since it is important that students can look after their own training, while the teacher is busy, sick, out of town, or there are visiting teachers etc. These sessions (usually given a nifty name like "Hong Kong Training") would typically be longer, at least 3 hours instead of 2, and students can come in and leave when they like. The students I pay the most attention to are those that are already hard at work when I get there, and are still there when I leave. My sifu would rarely organize the class when he came to visit a school; the instructor was expected to do so, and the students were expected to know what to do without much instruction – this means they need to know the lesson plan. Even though this kind of class is not regulated, the students especially the senior ones should not only do their own full exercise program and all their forms diligently, they should also change partners regularly and help the more junior students at least half the time, and not just train among themselves. The brackets between changing partners is usually longer, however, typically 20 minutes or half an hour, and perhaps are not so regular. Someone senior should call out "Change" at appropriate times as they notice the time, to remind those too focussed, or too junior to know, to change partners themselves.

No matter what kind of a class is organized, everyone should do Siu Lim Tao, and preferably everyone do it together. Doing it together enables the students to pick up nuances such as pace and breathing unconsciously.

Students that come in late **MUST STILL DO THE EXERCISES** and do the full amount of them. This is to teach some students that being late not only means you do not avoid the hard work, but, worse, that you have to do it alone instead of together. If a student is so late they miss beginning Siu Lim Tao, I do not allow them to train that session, unless they are advanced enough to know what to do, and do it well. If beginners are consistently late (or leave early), they can't really train, since they will not learn the exercises nor will Siu Lim Tao get up to standard, and are always interrupting the class coming and going. The punching at the end of class is critical,

so leaving early is not an option I allow in most cases. Allowances can be made for more senior people who already know enough to look after their training well enough (advanced enough to basically teach the class), or students who mostly get there and are diligent, but have good reason to miss some beginnings or endings. Only some. Missing all means they can't train. I also do not accept students who will only train once a week, or train intermittently.

Because of the critical nature of the order of class work, I think it's a very good idea to be punctual, so people know when class will start and when class will finish. Due to the nature of people, if a class starts at, say 7pm, then they will arrive at 7pm, then change, then get ready to train, and thus are usually at least 5 minutes late. Remind them to arrive early, and then, without saying so, always start class about 5 minutes after the time so they will be ready. And finish on time for those that have a schedule. The students can always do a little after class if they have time on their own.

The students should know what is expected of them, and when, without being told. Having a structure is especially important for younger people, as well, and enhances discipline. All doing things together also bonds the class as a unit, important for newcomers to feel part of the group. One reason I start everyone, new and experienced, exercising together, then separate out the ones who are still learning Siu Lim Tao from the group, and largely keep them separate for most of the class, but once they have completed learning the whole form, I then allow them to join in the punching at the end with the whole class again, is to create a kind of rite of passage, so they now know they are part of a group, and the other students also know it. It is good, in fact, if they are in some way congratulated in joining in.

## **Pre-training practice**

The students arrive; they should get ready by changing and so on so as to be ready to start class, not arrive 'on time' and then get ready to start. They should be ready to start, dressed etc., when class begins. This includes all things prior to class must be completed in a timely manner, such as roll marking, payments, changing the clothes, etc. This means the students should arrive early enough, perhaps ten or fifteen minutes, to get ready, pay fees etc., and do any extra warming up they need themselves such as stretch out or warm up injuries.

If they get ready early enough, they do whatever extra training is appropriate.

It is useful if a student can do some practice daily, or at least some prior to the training session.

Note that it is not appropriate to begin a form, especially Siu Lim Tao, or start punching the wall bag when class is about to start, since these training functions should not be interrupted until finished. This either leaves the teacher waiting for a student, or the student breaking a rule and not finishing the sequence. This is especially true for Siu Lim Tao, which is longer, and since you are all going to do it together anyway. Therefore, it is better to not start the bag or SLT form unless these will be finished a few minutes prior to when class is scheduled to start.

Examples of home/pre-class training:

- Siu Lim Tao each day. If this is done before class, arrive early enough to complete it before class.
- 50 punches hard, then light and loose.
- Exercises that the student has difficulty with.
- Some students need extra exercises or warm-up before they begin. They should arrive early enough to complete their own program before class.
- If the student has a partner outside of class, or if they start early in class when there is someone else available then they have the opportunity for training more seriously. They can practice standard drills – dan chi, double, rolling, stepping back, stepping forwards – chi sau drills, chi sau practice etc.

- More advanced students can practice more advanced forms while waiting for class to start.

**The rough order is this:**

- 1. Pre-training. Pay fees, mark roll, change, get ready. If early enough, own training as long as ready for the class to start.**
- 2. Class begins.**
  - a. 1<sup>st</sup> half hour: Warm up and Siu Lim Tao.**
  - b. 2<sup>nd</sup> half hour: Form checking/ teaching of juniors and dan chi, double, etc., up through stepping for more senior students.**
  - c. 3<sup>rd</sup> half hour: Chi sau, practicing known material, learning new things, drills, other practice.**
  - d. Last half hour:**
    - i. First twenty minutes - Continue with previous OR revision and correction of anything new learned, sometimes something new or different for interest. Extra-curricular practice. Answering questions.**
    - ii. The last ten minutes or so is spent on punching.**
- 3. Bow out, finish class, any own training if time is available, then go home.**

## **First Half Hour: Beginning the Class.**

The first half hour bracket is warm up and exercises (about fifteen to twenty minutes) followed by everyone doing Siu Lim Tao together (seven or fifteen minutes), in a formal fashion. For beginners, warm up is taken slowly and details taught, corrections and safe practices learned. If this is the case, the form is done fairly quickly as beginners can't handle long forms. They need time to condition themselves. For advanced students, the warm up is very vigorous and as short as possible, while still doing all the exercises, and the form is very slow – up to 20 minutes. The standard form should be about 7 minutes, with twenty minutes of exercise. Forms of 15 or 20 minutes are for advanced students, with correspondingly vigorous warmup. That is, for a seven minute form, each move of the slow part should take thirty seconds each, with advanced students doing about one minute per move. Thus, beginners take longer to do the warm up but faster to do the form, while the reverse is true of more advanced students. Every now and then, for advanced students, a form should be at least two minutes per move – a half hour form. This has many benefits, and these are discussed in other articles. The standard warm-up given previously can be done very vigorously, until the students can go through it quickly. If need be, more reps can be added in for those exceptionally fit ones, and each exercise has variations for increased difficulty levels. For students who are very much beginners, the leader can take the warm up slowly, taking 25 minutes, with a very short form of 3-5 minutes, (ten seconds per move of the slow part) so they can see the whole thing in it's entirety.

For students in a “HK class”, this first half hour is done on their own, after they first arrive. What they do should be based on what they are bad at, not what they can do well. They can leave out things they find easy, but should do everything they find hard. Outright beginners can feel all at sea in a self-directed class, so someone should be assigned as a leader for these students, should they come to one of these classes. With larger classes, I used to only make the HK classes available to students who had completed learning SLT, simply to make life easier, but these days, with smaller classes, I welcome new students, and they are led through the process until they are familiar enough to do it on their own.

For advanced students, in many schools warm up often consists of a few stretches or forms followed by vigorous chi sau. This is adequate, but lacks some points of the

exercises. It is fine if they attend normal classes on other days, but shows their commitment to full learning isn't as strong as desirable. If these are the only classes they attend, then their training probably isn't adequate for advanced learning unless the student is unusually fit or has some other way to make up for it. Or accomplished this level long ago, if they are very senior. Being able to do it is the reason for the exercises.

The class should start precisely on time, in order to learn discipline. Call everyone together, and begin warm-up.

## **Leading the Exercises.**

First and foremost, emphasis should be placed that this is not really a warm-up, or rather not solely a warm-up, but also a series of strengthening exercises. Many countries require warm-ups for exercise programs, either legislated or for insurance, and VTK qualifies. So, we call this a warm-up to satisfy legalities and other issues, but we must keep in mind that it is actually an exercise program, somewhat separate from the kung fu style itself, but still necessary.

How you approach the exercises will be how you approach your VTK, which is how you will fight. So, they should not be done lackadaisically, but with full heart and intention. Naturally, beginners should approach it carefully, and slowly, and take their time to prevent injury. As strength and flexibility increases, they should give more effort.

Junior students need help with exercises, in order to learn them safely, correctly and well. The priority should be for them to learn the basic, easier versions as soon as possible so they can do their own exercises if they are late to class sometime in the future, or if the school has sessions where the students mind their own training.

Safety is the key, here. Beginners, older people, younger people, overweight or other problems such as people with injuries or medical conditions have special needs and they should be encouraged, and challenged by the exercises, but not humiliated or injured by the difficulty. Some exercises are harder for men some for women. Likewise, some are easier. Be aware of which is which and watch for safety.

Leading the exercises should be done with these points in mind. The pace should suit the students, with the most inexperienced ones being given the right pace, the right number of repetitions, and the right degree of difficulty. This takes experience and observation. The more experienced students can put more into the exercises – reps, range, variations etc. – while the beginners learn how to do them, as the experienced students should already know how. However, the senior students should not do dangerous variations or exercises not on the beginners list or exercises outside the program, in order that new students aren't encouraged to take risks they should not, by trying to emulate seniors.

If there are a number of inexperienced students, I usually have two people involved with leading, cooperating. This makes a team of three in a larger class. One is obviously the “sifu” or head instructor or something like that. In medium classes, he can be the ‘observer’ as well, if you only need two people to lead and monitor the class. In very small classes the sifu is leader, observer and teacher all in one.

For the rest of the time, the team is as follows: One I will call the leader. He is the one who actually does the exercises, and yells out the commands, demonstrating the exercises. The other is an observer. He walks around, watching and he is the one who should advise the beginner how to do the exercises, if they get stuck or get confused. I usually call this person “the instructor” or “The observer” as appropriate. If they need to, the observer should let the rest of the exercises continue under the leader, while teaching the newcomer a limited number of the exercises, continuing each lesson to increase their knowledge until they can safely join the class or re-join the exercises with the others. Another senior can be designated to help one student with problems, or take them out of warm-up and teach them individually, if there are multiple beginners. This makes the team up to three people.

No-one but the leader should talk during the warm-up, unless the observer/instructor is needed, nor should anyone else give instruction except for those designated, in order to reduce confusion. Management of this is crucial especially as beginners are easily confused. Best to let the leader lead and the instructor instruct, and the rest mind their own training, even if they want to help, or know the person. Even the observer should talk quietly, only to the person needing help, and not interrupt the class.

The leader should use a clear, imperative voice, like a sergeant major in the military. “Do this, do that”. Commands should be short, clear and repetitious, and every person who leads should use the same words, the same labels and short descriptions, the same names for drills and exercises, and the same order as each other, to avoid confusion. Give the name of the drill before starting it, to teach the students the names. Doesn’t matter if the names are not standard or the same from school to school, just need something for the students to focus on. Don’t let the leader say too much, usually, unless in a small class where he can talk more quietly to give some help or advice to a beginner. The leader should not break exercise to do this, should simply pause, give

advice, and continue without moving from where he is. He should let the observer do his own job of individual instruction. The leader's job is the class as a whole.

Let the person instructing/observing give more information for the beginners, and he should follow the leader, and cooperate with him. For example, he can ask the leader to hold a position or exercise for a short time (Not too long, of course.) to allow the instructor time to explain some steps, especially if there is risk of injury. This should be done judiciously so the flow is not interrupted too much for the class as a whole.

The observer/instructor should speak only to the person needing help, quietly if possible, to avoid confusing the other students. Use the leader as a demonstration model, and point out the parts the student needs to take note of. It doesn't hurt to go over it a few times. Don't worry about the time, if the student needs to learn it, but do make sure that the other students don't suffer from holding one exercise too long etc. The sifu can hurry people up if need be.

The leader needs to be able to do the exercises well enough to demonstrate, and the observer familiar with exercise safety and what to avoid etc.

In classes where the students all know the basic versions at least, and no assistant/observer/instruction is needed, then the leader can run the class alone, and start to add variations as appropriate, increasing reps or increasing the pace, pushing the students to just a little better performance. Or can teach new variations, or meticulously correct exercises to make them even better.

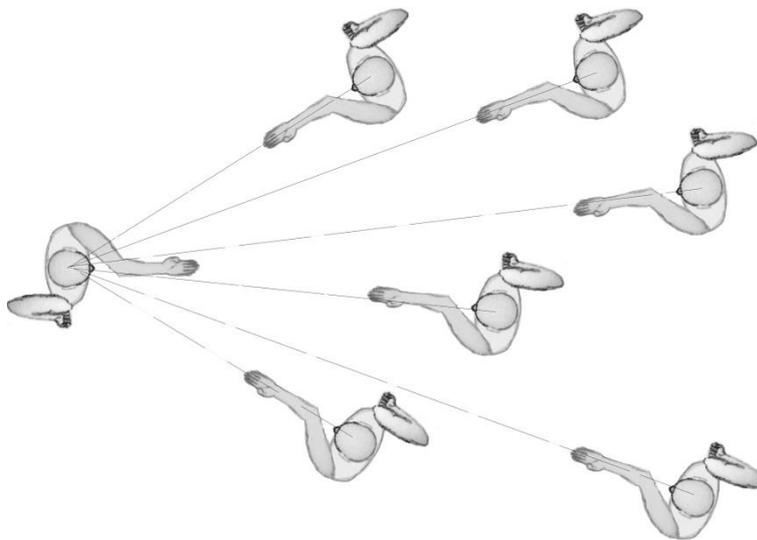
In other classes, I have regularly had one small group of beginners learning the exercises separately, letting the more advanced students do it themselves, or sometimes really being pushed hard by some very enthusiastic leader, and medium level guys being pushed along a little. It depends on class size and the current needs of the students.

For an example suitable exercise program, modified from Barry Lee's one, see a previous article on exercises.

Everyone should be given a few minutes to get a drink and take a very short break before doing the form. Now is a good time for any announcements. I often tell people what we will be doing that day here as well.

## How to lead the form in class.

First designate a leader, which may or may not be the sifu. If not, the sifu can walk around correcting and teaching. The leader can be anyone, really, although I use advanced students when beginners are in the class so they can see better versions, but I use beginners who have finished learning the form regularly when there are no new people. I feel that everyone should take turns leading, once they have finished learning the form, in order to build confidence, but I wait until I and they feel ready to do so, perhaps about one or two dozen lessons in. Ensure everyone is ready and that they are facing the “leader”. They should be Facing with their centre, not just looking at them. It doesn’t matter if they stand in rows or in random places, they must face the



leader. See diagram. The more junior the student the more important this is. For HK training, people should be able to do their own, for 7 minutes, without help or a clock. However, when people lead, I usually get the leader to face the clock so they can pace the movements.

The leader should do the form as perfectly as possible, and if beginners are in the class, they should do the basic moves rather than the advanced ones in order to avoid confusion.

When leading Siu Lim Tao, you should not look around, scratch, twitch or move around. You should not shift your stance, worry about mosquitoes or who is entering the room. Focus is important for kung fu. No extra moves should be made. If you want to look around, use your eyes and not your head. Say nothing. Move very clearly and precisely. You are being an example, and have to be more perfect than usual. The leader should do it the best they can so beginning students can emulate it.

Pacing is up to the teacher, but for beginners, I prefer that they do the slower part faster, and the faster part slower, in order to get an overall idea. Pacing is done by changing the rate of movement of the first section. The more advanced, the slower the

first part becomes. I prefer a 3 minute form for people who have not yet completely learned Siu Lim Tao, a 7 minute form as standard, with 15 minute and 20 or 25 minute forms done occasionally for progressively senior people. A 3 minute form (or 5, whatever) is done by making each move of tan/fook/wu sau take about 10 seconds. 6 moves for each hand is a total of about 2 minutes, with about one or two minutes for the remainder of the form. A seven (or 8 or so) minute form is about 30 seconds per move. (30 seconds x 12 plus 1 or 2 minutes for the remainder of the form). A 15 minute form is one minute per move, and a 25 minute or half hour form is 2 minutes per move. Longer forms can easily be calculated, for a once in a lifetime thrill of trying to train like WSL or Barry did every day, or I did when training with Barry regularly. Once we were in stance for over two hours – a very long form followed by dan chi etc., without moving stance. It was hell.

Since the leader is facing the clock, and the other students cannot, he can follow the clock and so pace it evenly but the students are not distracted by watching the clock. This conditions the students to a steady, even flow. After a while, they can do this pretty accurately on their own without a clock.

The remainder of the form should be paced slower, too, for beginners, making the moves clearly and precisely. However, one should not wait for them to follow, but simply continue at a steady pace. Remind the beginners that if they get lost, they should simply return to the standard waiting stance (elbows drawn back, fists at side, facing forwards, still in the training stance – and not to break stance.), and wait until they can follow again, or just wait until the end of the form. They should not talk or break stance, but wait quietly in this stance. It's a kind of discipline.

At the end of the form, close the form together even those who got lost, and perhaps debrief for any errors observed. Reassure beginners that it's not a problem, but reinforce that they need to learn it. If some people are still doing the form, wait for them to finish so everyone finishes together.

It is sometimes useful, especially with beginners, for the instructor to correct or advise the students during the form, but this should be kept to a quiet minimum, and corrections basically heard only by the person needing them, in order to maintain the peaceful nature of Siu Lim Tao. Instruction should not be overdone at this time. Barry preferred that nothing to be said or anything else to be done other than Siu Lim Tao

during this quiet time. Although it is often necessary to correct beginners, one should not correct the leader during this time so they can keep their pace and focus, but if they make mistakes, tell them later.

## **Second Half Hour: Basic Training section**

The second half hour is spent on correction of forms, and/or chi sau, starting with Dan Chi. In effect, most of the time is spent in Seung ma/Tui ma practice for those that have accomplished sufficient standards, but mostly spent on forms for those that have not.

During this half hour, the instructor is mostly supervising, or settling confusions between students that arise when they are correcting each other. Over the class period, probably as much of the instructor's effort is spent on time management as is devoted to corrections and instruction.

Having the students correct each other's Siu Lim Tao is a very good form of quality control, and also helps senior people learn how to teach and keeps basic knowledge familiar and updated, plus beginners get personal attention, and students get to know each other faster. I do this at least half the time.

Students pair up, the most senior students with the most junior. Senior students correct the junior student's Siu Lim Tao. The junior student is corrected FIRST then the senior demonstrates his form if there is time. The movements of the slow part should be done quite fast (count of ten per movement is fine), so there is time for much of the form to be examined. When the more senior student does his, the junior student can correct and/or ask why things are different. This is often a learning experience for both students, and prevents arrogance and complacency in seniors. Encourage talking and criticism, and encourage the students, especially beginners, to ask any and all questions and raise any and all doubts or confusions. Any time the students are confused or disagree on interpretations with each other etc., the instructor can explain so that both students know. If it is important enough, the whole class can be stopped for a moment, and the point explained to everyone. This ensures that information is spread throughout the school. It also means efficient use of the teacher's time, only explaining the points that people don't know, rather than wasting time going over the things the student's already understand fully. Because the beginner is asking questions, this tests the more senior student's knowledge at every level so they truly do understand and not just think they do; a perennial problem.

If there are advanced pairs, they can do more advanced corrections, or perhaps more advanced forms. Once the form is corrected, the students perform the section/s (and

only those sections – although this could include the whole form) that needed correction three times on their own, to consolidate what they have had corrected. If it is known what the student is weak at, or if the student has been away a long time or if the student is from another style, perhaps it would be better to focus on a particular section that is most troubling. If more than one section needs work, just work from the earliest section needing work, and ignore the other sections for now.

Usually, only correct about a half dozen main errors, since students can't remember too many, and usually only remember the last few they were told anyway. Try to ensure that the corrections are the most important ones. Especially, correct the order of moves first in beginners, then structures, then movements, then kinds of movements, etc. Don't worry about little details if the big ones are wrong. Don't worry about power for example as much as about shapes and angles etc.

Try to spend no more than about 15 minutes on this. 15 minutes can tie with the remainder of the class and the 15 minute change of partners. If you are able to coordinate it, you could do either 20 minutes of correction for beginners with a change of partners every 10 minutes for the chi sau guys, changing on the second correction, or 10 minutes of correction, and coordinate the class together again on the first change. Sometimes the entire 30 minutes is needed, though, and regularly perhaps once a month, I use the entire thirty minutes for quality control for everyone, no matter how senior.

For the following 15 minutes, go into the following stage:

Either

- a. Beginners who have not learned Siu Lim Tao in its entirety will learn the next section, as long as the previous section is up to standard. If it isn't, they will practice what they have learned for this bracket of 15 minutes, usually alone. Sometimes someone senior can correct some more, but usually it is better to let them try themselves and keep an eye on them to make sure they are remembering the order etc. If the student has completed Siu Lim Tao satisfactorily, but nothing else, it might be time for them to learn the wall exercise and get ready for dan chi at this point.

- b. Those with forms up to standard can begin dan chi etc., starting from Dan Chi doing 30 reps of each hand and top and bottom, then move on to 30 reps of each side of Double, then Rolling, then starting on Seung/Tui Ma. Partners should change every ten or 15 minutes.

For classes with everyone up to standard with Siu Lim Tao, or that part of the class that is up to standard or on days when you decide no corrections are desired, they should begin chi sau training, starting from Dan Chi doing 30 reps of each hand and top and bottom, then move on to 30 reps of each side of Double, then Rolling, then starting on Seung/Tui Ma. Partners should change every ten or 15 minutes. Fifteen minutes can coordinate with the remainder of the class if the beginners are doing corrections.

Very new students are often taught parts of Siu Lim Tao in this period, or their first lesson in Dan Chi when they are ready for it. Most of the rest of advancements I usually leave until the last half hour, after the students are tested as to their capability to advance.

For those who are more advanced, they move through the system, doing 30 of each left and right hand, of each dan chi top and bottom, then double dan chi, then rolling for 30 each hand, then 30 steps each leg backwards and forwards before beginning chi sau. They should not be perfunctory, but as good as they can get. And they should not stop for breaks if possible. Muscle conditioning is important too.

Usually students do not have enough time to get much further into the system than stepping, even if they power through the drills.

For HK training, this would be where the students continue through their forms, in order; Chum Kiu, Dummy, Biu Jee, etc., before starting Chi Sau. They would then do the same training as in an ordinary class: 30 reps each, top and bottom, left and right arm, or inside and outside, as appropriate of dan chi, double, rolling, seung/tui ma, backwards AND forwards left and right leg.

## **Third Half Hour: Miscellaneous Training section**

I sometimes call this period “Sifu’s Section” because this is highly variable and up to the Sifu’s choice. This half hour is spent mostly on the sifu teaching actively the whole class, quite often teaching new things. It is when students other than those learning Siu Lim Tao are taught new sections of the system, such as chi sau, other forms, advanced correction such as dummy etc, or the whole class is taught something interesting. For advanced students, at other times this could simply be chi sau. About half the time or a little more, the class should simply be that, following normal format.

However, once or twice a week, it is good to do a ‘project’. This is a good timeslot to introduce short ‘projects’, but occasionally most of the class can be spent on special projects, after either the group SLT or filling both this timeslot and the following one to the end of class, giving lesson times from 30 minutes to 1 ½ hours. It could be spent on many different topics, either in small groups or the class as a whole covering a single topic. Once per week the topic will be a short half hour one. The other time per week, it will be a larger topic, possibly part of a series stretching over many classes and weeks.

Don’t do projects on the same day each week, but randomize them somewhat so people who come on different days get to learn over time as well. I do some kind of project about once or twice a week, with some being series covered serially to cover the whole topic, sometimes on consecutive days, sometimes some follow a week later. Others just take one day, or one half hour session. I never schedule them, except maybe to promise to cover something “next time”, when a topic comes up. It then follows what the students want to learn, and can be adjusted at need to what the students need to learn. No point covering Chum Kiu if people need Siu Lim Tao, or going through basic applications to a bunch of people who have done it a million times before and probably could teach it for you. At times I have done exactly that with trainee instructors, saying “take that bunch of beginners and go through the whole standard SLT applications” or something like that.

Probably each topic gets covered about once a year. That’s about 50 or 100 different topics – not an overly large number, but a fair one. If you run out, do the topics more often, or only do one project a week or fortnight, and fill the time with more chi sau,

which is not a bad thing anyway. I randomise projects so that about once a year each type gets covered. In a single class, usually two 15 minute periods can cover two examples for those that are practical oriented, or sometimes 3. Always try to not make theory too theoretical. It is best to include practical demonstrations the students can try for themselves to get the idea, but at the very least, try to include demonstration they can at least watch.

### **Listening in class**

When students are listening to the teacher, they should measure out their stance and listen attentively in the standard waiting stance. It is alright if the student has the hands by their side, rather than pulled back, but that would be even better. There is no reason for them not to practice stance or other things such as dan chi while listening, as long as they are quiet, and can pay attention while doing something else. In fact, if a student can pay attention while doing something else, this is good training.

### **It is hard to be fully comprehensive, but some ideas are as follows:**

About once every 3 to 6 months I make a project to go through the entire of Siu Lim Tao move by move, over a period of a week or so, doing drills, movements, corrections etc., so teaching new students things they may not yet have got, plus keeping the senior guys on their toes. Usually it takes me about two weeks to go through the whole thing just on drills of alternative techniques. Another series is often the exact details on how to do the form, and advanced versions and interpretations compared to basic ones including applications, about once a year, taking about a week. Another series would be different applications, once per year, about a week, but a few months later, another week, with different applications. Relate theory to practice in SLT, another week. How SLT fits into the other forms, the whole style, etc., another week. More quality control.

Regularly get the guys doing chi sau to stop fighting with it, but do it slowly, and go over things. If one guy can do something the other can't, they should teach the other one, and if one can stop something the other can't, they should also teach the other one. If they keep getting caught in a particular fashion, don't give them the answer; make them explore it slowly until they can work out some answers for themselves.

Regularly vary the chi sau – today light, tomorrow heavy, now fast, now do it as slowly as you can, now one does it slowly while his partner tries fast, or heavy while the other is light, etc.

For example, they could try rolling with perfection so that the other's chi sau doesn't work. That is, good position dissolving attacks before they can work. One partner can ONLY roll, the other can attack freely. The senior partner should be the one only doing the rolling, or both can if they are the same. The junior partner will have difficulty doing this to someone more senior.

Periodically, do something focussed on more advanced ideas for interest and for the senior guys, like something about the dummy, chi sau or chum kiu etc. The rest of the class can listen, even try some things, but I limit this. Some practical drills are useful. Even a brief introduction to things they won't learn for some time can be inspiring, e.g. Biu Jee or weapons etc.

Sometimes explain why things must be done just so. E.g. explaining the advancement system, what criteria we are looking for etc. so they can see what the instructor is thinking about. Explain why techniques not quite right may not work. Useful to have drills or exercises for them to explore the idea themselves.

Very occasionally, blind fold chi sau is good for the confidence. Only do it for a short while. The JUNIOR student should be blindfolded, not both, because the senior guy is going to get hit. It's easier to determine direction and to hit but harder to control the range and power of strikes while blindfolded, so the student can't pull their blows, but hit pretty hard. The sighted student has to block well, or be hit. Good for both people.

Alternative or nonstandard uses for standard techniques. Exploration time for the students.

Kicks in VTK. Various exercises and drills etc. Once a month or so. Different aspects each time. Seniors, of course, start to train in kicking about Chum Kiu level, so they do it more often, such as daily, in their own time.

Another regular project is once per week doing some self-defence drills, or some standard drills. Usually can do 2 in this half hour period.

About every 3 months, go through all the basic drills. About two in the half hour. I usually cover something once a week, but this takes about 3 months to go through them all.

Various footwork ideas such as leg locks, sweeps, ankle kicks, biu jee stepping for trips etc.

Theory classes, once a fortnight or so. Cover different issues such as psychology of violence, standard VTK theories, examples of combat etc. Include demonstrations the students can try themselves, or at least show them if possible. Try to make it exciting. This is not always possible, but if not, then at least try to make it inspiring. Not an easy task, but a Sifu's job is to inspire students.

About once per week I do an energetic drill such as one of these or something similar:

- Get the whole class stepping, racing across the room, relays or some other competitive thing. Pair juniors with seniors.
- Energetic drills such as chasing pads. More senior students can have backwards, random directions etc. as well. Other pad drills like Ant's drill for random hands or
- Drill for stepping by turning around to unknown distance to pads and chasing them. (Shannon's drill)
- Charging across room and punching pad
- 3 steps and through pad
- Mad punching across the room.
- Paired stepping drills like punching and advancing vs. jum sau backwards. After a few times forwards, reverse it, so one is attacking backwards and defending forwards. Pak is good for this too, but tan or garn doesn't work well.
- Bong sau drills. Since these involve the students clashing arms when they make a mistake, don't overdo it. The purpose is to get them to know about it, and realize that clashing is likely to be inevitable but definitely undesirable. They will perfect the bong with the first defences of chi sau.
- Just getting people to hit things after a technique. Lots of drills, padding up, focus mitts etc. are good for this.

- Hitting something hard like a pad or a phone book. Especially important for beginners, young people or ladies, or anyone who hasn't hit people in anger etc.

Other stuff, such as fighting other styles, at random but fairly long intervals. Examples are given below. These may, and often do, occupy the entire class period, rather than short parts, or can be spread over a longer period. However, spreading over a longer period risks people forgetting or missing out on earlier parts that later parts depend upon.

- Knife fighting – A series of 3 or 4 lessons, about once a year, on defending against knives, fighting with knives and sticks and so on in various combinations, ending with fighting barehanded against knives and/or sticks. It usually follows a class or two on how to use knives and sticks.
- Kicking defences, garn sau vs. some standard karate/TKD kicks etc.
- Arnis/Philippines weaponry, both teaching them and defending against it. I usually incorporate it into the Knife Fighting lessons, but sometimes I do some more in depth such as teaching some drills, sinawalis, some more interesting aspects.
- Grappling. A series of three or four lessons vs. grapplers, ground fighting, chokes, resisting being taken down, etc., at increasing disadvantage and difficulty. This can be incorporated into normal training, too, as drills.
- Ground fighting i.e. VTK ground fighting, not just fighting grapplers. Part of the above series as well.
- Sword work, both for and against, incorporating how to defend vs. baseball bats, and how to use weapons so people can't defend so easily. "sword length weapons" is probably a better description, like axe handles etc.
- Sports martial arts, and how to modify VTK for sport. Using the bag to get penetrating power for gloves.
- Thai boxing. Dealing with low kicks, shin kicks, etc., and neck grabs and knees and so on.

- Western Boxing. Hard to deal with. Thinking alternatively. Assumed rules.
- Demonstrations for friends, and public demonstrations. Every now and then I would run a series of extra classes on the weekends for interested people, so as to have a demo team on tap. Also includes how to show off for your friends with VTK.
- Martial arts tricks for fun and profit. How so called masters fake 'kung fu magic', e.g. Chi tricks, reality behind death touch, tai chi unbendable arm.
- Modifying other martial arts techniques for those who are advanced in other arts. This is a pretty advanced session, usually needs pretty advanced people in both VTK and other styles. Often closed to beginners because they get confused.
- Often I teach the students how to use a couple of techniques from other martial art styles if I have the experience myself or if there is someone senior in the class that can do the other art. Then teach them how to defeat it. Teaching something from another style allows the partners to practice more realistically against the other style, but I usually restrict it to one technique, then the students practice the defence against it. If there is time, then teach another technique, and then teach how defend against it, and so on. This way, the student doesn't think they know all about the other style, either, and they also usually have their curiosity about other styles sated, so they are less likely to stray to other styles.
- Occasionally used to get more senior people to pad up, and then they use non-VTK techniques vs. less senior people (when ready for this), who hit them hard, more realistic fighting stuff. Get the more gung-ho people to be on the receiving end, especially from junior or younger people or ladies. They need to say how much it hurts when they get hit by the weaker students, for confidence. I usually carefully monitor this, and the seniors do the same kind of thing in their own time or their own separate classes, or in a different room from the juniors. Note that when the Senior people do it together more realistically and try to actually hit

the others HARD for fighting practice. Beginners should not be exposed to this too early.

At odd intervals usually spaced over a long time, I cover other things such as

- Other exercises for skills, such as the “getting up exercise”
- Running around backwards for peripheral vision.
- “7 fists” of VTK
- Biu jee stepping for crowds
- Bagua stepping as an exercise
- Tripodal dummy stuff
- Explanations about things like dummy.
- History of VTK and/or kung fu and stories about WSL Barry, masters etc. in history. Usually these are for when the students have been training hard and it's too hot to do much more.
- Teaching about listening to stepping for light footwork
- Psychology of conflict.
- Experimenting with techniques, trying out variations (“find completely different uses 7 uses for tan sau” or for the punch etc) Making people think about their style.
- Other random weird stuff.

## The Last Half Hour

The first twenty minutes or so of the final half hour is spent doing what the student is up to. The sifu wanders around, checking each student's progress. Continued training is usually still done in pairs, and changing partners every ten minutes or so.

For advanced students, this is often more chi sau.

For people who learned something new, it is used for revision plus some corrections, so they don't forget what they learned.

Absolute Beginners (don't know the form yet) learn the punch, and practice either tan da or fook sau or whatever part of Siu Lim Tao they are learning.

This period could also simply be a continuation of the last half hour if a project or topic is being covered, until the last ten minutes at the end of the class, when we should start punching practice.

At the end of this part, the teacher should ask if there are any questions, and answer them if they are pertinent to the class, or answering them later if they are just for the one student, after class.

If there are any announcements, this is a good time to do them as well, while everyone is waiting to begin the next part, the most vital part of training, punching. The other time to do announcements is after warm up, but before the form, while everyone is chilling a bit and getting a drink.

## **Punching**

At the end, punching practice is done. This should be about ten or fifteen minutes practicing punching, either counting and punching or doing different kinds of punching or punching combinations, punching with other techniques, or simply just hard punching. This creates endurance and also creates powerful punches that fully extend thus damaging your opponent. These become reflex so that the student can't pull the punch so that he fails to injure the opponent. The student will always hit hard. If it's been a hard session, or it is running late, 50 punches on the spot is good enough as long as it is not every night.

My sifu regularly (but not always) would get us to do 50 punches several times a session, perhaps once every half hour at times, in order to keep the momentum up. This is especially good on cold nights, or nights where there seems to be more talking (not always a bad thing) than working.

All of these can be done as individual training drills in the other parts of the class, in order to improve the techniques, but doing this here means a lot is done in a short time.

Everyone (except people who haven't yet finished learning SLT, who are learning the punch from someone senior) gets in a circle, in the training stance. One person is designated the starter, and starts to count. One HARD punch per count. Then the person next to them counts, one punch per count. You can go around the whole circle once, or just for fifty, then either finish by going onto the 'end of punching', or start doing some punching drills.

Some examples of punching drills:

- \*Punching with wrist roll, as in the form.
- \*Quick draw punches – from a relaxed position with hands down by your sides. Usually done as doubles. Like the punch from garn sau at the end of Chum Kiu.
- Punches with other techniques:
  - \*Tan da – punch with tan
  - Tan and punch same hand
  - \*Garn da – punch with garn
  - Jum and punch same hand

- Pak and punch same hand
- Pak da
- Any technique with a punch, either with same hand or with the other hand is ok. Plenty to choose from.
- Punching by numbers – any number from 1 to 10
  - Doubles two punches per count (all even numbers have to be done twice, since the students must first lead with left, then right hand. So after doubles etc., the instructor says “change”. Everyone changes hands, and the next student in line counts to, doing doubles with the other hand leading.) same goes for 4, 6, 8 and 10
  - \*Triples 3 punches one count. (odd numbers always alternate already so no need to do twice.) Same goes for 5, 7, and 9.
  - Doubles or better triples with emphasis on trying to make ‘one sound’. (even pace between punches, but very short time.)
- Variations
  - By number – the student counts one, punches once, two, punches twice, etc. up to ten.
  - By number backwards – student counts 10, ten punches, 9, nine punches etc. down to 1
  - \*Hi middle low – triple punch, with first to head, midsection then low. Ensure the students punch over their hand each time, and not do the low punch under their other hand.
  - \*Doubles punching with the front hand first.

Obviously, this is not a comprehensive list, and more can be added easily. We usually do most of these most of the time, especially those marked “\*”. Seniors can do most of these with pivoting as appropriate – some are better with short pivots, others with 45 degree pivots. Pivoting makes this a hard exercise.

Each exercise is only be used once. Once students know the variations, it can be made into a game. Each student has to think of something the others haven’t said yet, and when it is their turn to count, declare it before they start to count.

### **End of punching**

The students can do 50 very fast punches after the drills, for speed punching training.

The end of punching is signified with 50 light and loose punches to finish, as part of a cool-down. These punches must also fully extend, but are light and relaxed.

Finally, at the end of the punching, a slight warm down, mostly of the arms doing things like arm rotations.

### **Ending the class**

The teacher thanks the students for coming, hope they had a good class/learned something, and then bows to the students, who bow in return, thus ending the class.

Usually it is nice to hang around for a half hour or so to discuss any points with the students, or once a week does something social.

### **Workshops.**

Note that I run workshops on a similar schedule, just the brackets and the various sections the class is divided into are longer, and more of them, usually expanding from 2 hours simply to whatever hours the workshop is for. There is also usually a unifying plan for the workshop, although usually it is simply getting people up to standard, and filling in missing information.

1. Introduction – who the hell am I. ten minutes, usually before workshop. I like to get there half an hour or so before time, so people can chat and I can get to know what the feeling is they expect to learn.
2. Exercises/warm-up fifteen minutes (if they know it) half an hour if they don't know it. I can have it led, or lead it, or someone can lead it for the class, I don't care. Can even be left out, but Barry wanted everyone to learn 'his' style of warm-up, so I would like to continue his ideas. Plus doing warm-up together makes everyone feel like they have started for the day.
3. Siu Lim Tao usually short form, maybe 7 minutes or so (30 sacs per hand) and then some corrections, do it again with partners, etc. Totalling about half hour to an hour. Since it's the foundation of all VTK should be sure it's good enough.
4. Dan Chi etc. depend on the level. Stepping is usually covered in this section, so it can be quite long. An hour.
5. Chi Sau etc. again depends on level. Could be long.

6. Chum Kiu etc. Fixing problems is vital.
7. Dummy etc. Usually I restrict it a bit to more senior people, and usually to corrections rather than advancing people. Usually not too long, half hour or so, unless needed to be longer.
8. Special points, questions etc. This gets expanded or deleted upon need.
9. Punching and bowing out - ten minutes
10. Debrief – half hour or so after the end.

Questions, drills, topics, etc. spread through as appropriate.

Once students/teachers etc. are up to standard, I have no objection doing “seminars” on specific topics, as a separate class. Or for that matter, if the students are interested in something, I can cover it in a workshop, if there is time.

Note that I expect people attending workshops to be there from the beginning to the end, and that things should be on schedule such as starting times and finishing times. This includes from beginning the exercises, through SLT all the way to the punching and bowing out at the end. It is bad manners and disrespectful to simply leave a workshop without bowing out.

I usually like to spend about half hour or an hour after class for debriefing and questions etc., and it’s a good idea to go somewhere to chat about VTK etc. after the session. And drink tea, if in China. Or beer if not.