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JOURNAL ARTICLES

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## The Triangle

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Due to the efforts initially of the Gracie family, and many others to follow, Brazilian jiu-jitsu was introduced to the United States in the 1970s and has since thrived. Jiu-jitsu has evolved into a popular art and one of the essential elements of the growing sport of mixed martial arts (MMA).

The triangle symbolizes Brazilian jiu-jitsu both philosophically and physically. The triangle shape is embedded in the logos of schools across the country. It represents not only the distribution of balance and strength that a jiu-jitsu player's body should possess but also the spiritual aspect, the three sides representing mind, body, and spirit. In its simplest, most physical explanation, though, it represents the submission known as the triangle choke.

The triangle choke is a blood choke, which restricts the flow of blood through the carotid arteries to the brain. When applied properly, it can quickly render the opponent unconscious.

The set-up for the triangle varies depending on whether you are training with or without a gi (traditional kimono-style jacket). For the sport of mixed martial arts, which is the most functional and practical of the modern martial arts, no-gi techniques are most applicable.

As I describe the points of the triangle, Cindy Omatsu demonstrates the movements in the photographs. Cindy has been studying Brazilian jiu-jitsu for well over a decade, is a black belt under Rigan Machado, and was the first American woman to be given the distinction of black belt.

## Photo 1

The most effective way to control an opponent in no-gi jiu-jitsu is to overhook one of their arms and pull their head down. While doing this, you should be sitting up in a “crunch” position. The goal is to constantly limit the amount of space between yourself and your opponent. It is all about pressure and constriction.

In photo 1, Cindy Omatsu has her opponent's left arm overhooked and is clamping her left elbow to her ribs. She is pulling down on his head with her right hand.



## Photo 2

The next step is to gain wrist control of the free arm. There are different ways to maintain control of your opponent once you let go of their head. Some people teach to keep your leg across the back of the opponent. In this case, Cindy prefers to keep her left foot lodged on the hip of her opponent, controlling his movement. She can also use this to angle herself to her right, so she is no longer directly in line with him. This will help her when she makes the move to lock in the triangle and results in a tighter triangle. Changing the angle will also help people who struggle with flexibility.

Cindy can then grab his wrist to trap his free arm. She has two options: she can grab the free hand, with her thumb toward the ground, and push it between her legs, quickly pulling her own arm out in order to cinch the triangle with her legs. Or she can push his hand to the outside, with her thumb toward the ceiling, and pull her leg through. Either approach will leave him with one arm trapped in front and one arm behind him. Any time an opponent has “one arm in,” they are susceptible to a triangle choke.



In photo 2, Cindy is pushing his arm to the outside, so next she pulls her leg through the space she has created and anchors her right foot behind her left knee. It is important to lock the foot tightly behind the knee. You can use your hand to pull on your foot and accomplish this.

## The Triangle (continued...)

### Photo 3

Make sure the top of the foot or the base of the ankle is behind the knee. It should not be the arch of the foot or the toes. You should be able to flex your foot and use it as a hook around your knee. Your other foot should be cranking downward to create tension and increase the tightness of the triangle.



### Photo 4

Many instructors teach to slide the trapped arm across the chest, but it is not absolutely necessary to complete execution of the triangle. The two most important things, once you have cinched your legs into the triangle, are squeezing your knees together and pulling down on your opponent's head.

The strongest grip to use when pulling on the opponent's head, and in general in no-gi jiu-jitsu, is what wrestlers call the "Gable grip". Make a thumbless paw with your hands and grip them together. Push outward with your elbows while gripping your hands and pulling them downward on the back of your opponent's head.





## Photo 5

This whole time you should be squeezing your knees together, creating as much pressure as possible and making the actual triangle created by your body as small as possible. At this point you should also lift your hips up into the air. If your opponent is successful in his defense and has not yet tapped, the arm can be pushed to the side for added help in completing the triangle.

Be aware that your opponent will be actively trying to escape and one of the very real dangers in applying a triangle is that of getting slammed. Though not legal in many grappling tournaments, slamming is fully accepted in MMA. To safeguard yourself from getting slammed, use your arm to hook your opponent's leg and hug it to you, preventing them from standing and pulling you up into the air. In this case, Cindy would underhook her opponent's left leg with her right arm.

Always be ready to switch to an alternate submission while you are fighting for the triangle. The arm bar frequently appears as an option when your opponent is fighting to escape and possibly attempting to stand up (photo 5).



### Practice Drill

A useful drill for practicing triangles is to partner everyone up and practice cinching the triangle, repeatedly trapping either arm of the opponent. This can be done as a warm-up or part of a technique section of class:

1. Partner A is in the guard of Partner B.
2. Partner A offers his left arm forward, offering no resistance, but maintaining proper posture.
3. Partner B applies the triangle and Partner A taps when appropriate.
4. Partner A then switches arms and offers his right arm forward. Partner B then applies the triangle on the other side.

The idea is to flow quickly back and forth, doing a series of ten triangles, always paying close attention to the details—getting the foot cinched in at the ankle, cranking the other foot downward, squeezing the knees together, pulling on the head with the proper grip, and arching the hips. Once Partner B has completed ten triangles, the partners should switch positions and continue the drill. Done regularly, this drill will help the technique feel more natural and will increase flexibility.

This drill can also be used to practice squeezing the knees together. Use the drill time to attempt to elicit the tap just by using the squeezing alone, without the head pull.

### Examples of the triangle choke in action

For a good triangle example, watch Matt Hughes vs. Carlos Newton in UFC 34 to see an infamous battle and the use of slam technique for defense.

Quinton Jackson also successfully used this defense against Ricardo Arona at Pride Critical Countdown 2004, resulting in a stunning knockout.

In the world of grappling, Eddie Bravo vs. Royler Gracie contains an excellent example of a triangle choke executed by Eddie Bravo.

\* [Sherdog.com](http://Sherdog.com) is a great resource for videos of grappling, fighting, instructionals, etc.

**Becca Borawski** teaches and trains at [Petranek Fitness/CrossFit Los Angeles](http://Petranek Fitness/CrossFit Los Angeles) in Santa Monica, Calif. She has a master's degree in film from the University of Southern California and a background in martial arts training. She has blended these skills together to produce DVDs and build websites for professional fighters. Her main job is as the music editor on the TV show *Scrubs* and she currently trains jiu-jitsu under Eddie Bravo at 10th Planet Jiu-Jitsu in Hollywood.