

## **Jackie Chan's Timing Errors: How to Avoid Them**

**by Keith Pascal**

Are you a Jackie Chan fan? Do you love watching movies filled with action and excellent martial-arts sequences?

The choreography in his movies is almost beyond real ... and that's one of the problems....

Don't get me wrong; I'm not complaining about him, at all. Whether watching one of the Rush Hour movies, a dubbed oldie from his early film career, or even Jackie's first movie filmed in English, The Big Brawl, I delight in the way he tumbles over objects, rolls with the punches, and makes use of impromptu weapons.

Do any of those sequences or even small combinations taken from within a series ever happen in real fights?

The action vignettes really are well choreographed ... each detail planned. Lift the bench, stop the kick, spin and pivot the bench like a staff, turn, pivot again, fall back, body-snap to a standing position, more dodging, jumping, and strike-respond series of moves.

And it all happens on a beat. Hit -- block -- pivot -- kick -- turn -- spin -- punch -- punch -- grab a barstool ...

Very rhythmic.

### **What Do Jackie Chan Sequences Have to Do with You?**

If you have problems landing your techniques on your opponent, if everything seems predictable to your enemy, then you could be suffering from Jackie-Chan-itis.

Look, if you can detect the rhythm in those Jackie-Chan scenes, then maybe your enemy can detect your rhythm as well. It's just common sense.

By the way, having a rhythm doesn't require striking with the nearest hat rack or floor lamp in a modulated, 1 -- 2 -- 3 series, you do this and they do that, and then you....

It doesn't take grabbing the nearest chair as a weapon. Many martial artists (you?) exhibit a set pace, even when executing "the basics," empty-handed. No impromptu weapons necessary.

FYI -- If you were fascinated by the idea of Jackie Chan's use of impromptu weapons, you might like some of the

ebonuses that come with 10 Days to Better Knife Fighting.

Remember, avoid the rhythm of choreographed martial-arts movies.

At this point in the article, are you thinking, "Heck, Keith, I'll just avoid a set rhythm all together"? Many seasoned martial artists already know the trap we can fall into with this type of thinking. Avoiding rhythmic responses?

As many of you know, that's not necessarily the answer. I remember when a seventeen year old student at school challenged me....

### **The No-Pattern Pattern of Fighting**

When I was a high-school teacher, pupils used to come and talk to me about martial arts — sometimes respectfully, and sometimes with a little challenge in their attitude.

One time, this young, "almost" adult, whose father was an officer in the air force, brought up the topics of timing and distance. He wanted to try his "broken-rhythm timing" on me.

We squared off, and I must admit, it was hard to tag the guy. Not only was he taller and had longer reach, but he was darting in and out of range, at will. Sometimes, he'd barely move in on me, only to jump right back out of range. Other times, he seemed to draw me in with his retreats, and then suddenly spring forward in an attack.

Very unpredictable.

Completely random, right?

Let's not jump to conclusions.

I stepped out of range, and started working from a little bit further away from him.

Note: Increasing the distance slightly is a good tip, when you are trying to suss a situation, or are having problems against an opponent, in a sparring session.

It took less than a half a minute (rough guess) to figure him out. Even his non-choreographed, supposedly-random movements exhibited "pattern."

In order to break a predictable rhythm, he had practiced a few different sequences, and he was switching between his three variations. My student's choices seemed to be:

- \* move in with one step, and then dart out with two steps (forward, back, back)
- \* move back with two steps, and then in with three (back, back, forward, forward, forward)
- \* move back with one step and then in with two (back, forward forward)

He did a mix-and-match of the above three, to confuse his opponent.

Have you ever fought someone who was all dart-n-dash?

### **How to Shut Down a Dart-n-Dash, In-and-Out Fighter**

My first adaptation, after figuring him out, was to avoid chasing him during his retreat. His variations occurred as I advanced, and it became his best time to surprise me.

Along with avoiding the chase, when he moved back, I noticed that the last two pattern choices caused him to pause at exactly the same spot, as he advanced. The variation occurred in the "when" of him getting to the set distance.

Once again, his variations together as a group created predictable moves. (After I told him, he gave up martial arts and became a certified public accountant. Just kidding, but he didn't seem happy that I now "was playing the game" one step ahead of him.

I'm sure you'll agree that knowing precisely where your opponent is going to be might give you ... oh ... just a bit of an advantage. As I said, the only question was on which beat he'd land in the sweet spot ... and that only varied by one count, once I stopped chasing him. The chase was a requisite for him to confuse his opponent.

Isn't it ironic that those who try to avoid a pattern end up creating an even more pronounced one?

### **How To Overcome Attacking and Countering to a Set Rhythm**

You don't want to react and counter in your real emergencies or sparring competitions like an action-movie actor memorizing a long sequence for a film. And, as mentioned above, if you try to avoid a rhythm, you'll probably create a new one that could be even more pronounced.

No wonder it's so hard to surprise the enemy, and no wonder the enemy can react with lightning speed to your techniques. (Maddening, isn't it?)

How should you overcome this constant, set rhythm to your attacks and counters?

The answer lies in music. No kidding.

Have you ever been to a concert where one of the band members gets the audience clapping in rhythm?

Did you match everyone else and clap when they clapped? Do you always clap on the same beat as the rest of the people in the auditorium?

I don't.

Sometimes, I switch into double time, clapping twice for each of the audience's single hitting of the palms. Other times, I might hit quadruple time. And still other times, I pause on the beat where everyone else is clapping, and I clap on the off beat, creating a quiet, syncopated noise.

Now, relate these percussive changes to martial arts....

What if you could move and strike on the beats that don't match the expected rhythm?

What if you could switch between rapid fire (four or eight hits for each beat) and skipping beats, so you catch your opponent in the middle of....

Cool idea, agreed?

### **One Simple Way to Destroy The Beat**

To start out, you could get a simple metronome, and start it sounding off as you execute your moves. Then, practice hitting any time "other than on the beat."

Next, take a two-move combination, and vary the time between techniques. Punch with the click of the metronome. Then punch across the beat, where the first move begins slightly before the tick, and the second move occurs on or slightly after the sound.

Then add another variation and punch between the beats. (You will probably have to speed up the metronome time.)

Also, experiment by adding on a quick, extra hit, after the two practiced moves.

That's a good beginning for avoiding the move-for-move, looks-very-planned, trading of hits with your opponent. If your hits and kicks "look" unplanned, you'll have a better chance of ... getting the opportunity for even more hits and kicks.

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Are you interested in exploring precise timing in a two-move combination? May I suggest that you check out **How to End the Fight with One Hit** (or in this case, two or three strikes).

Not only will you find a natural way to eliminate the pause, but you'll see the logic behind when you should reverse the order of the sequence.

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