

Flow Drills in Jujitsu

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INTRODUCTION:

There is a wide variety of practice and training methods in Jujitsu for improving your skills. One training method which could be utilized more in dojos is the “Flow Drill”. This type of drill is a very good exercise to develop good balance and a fluid technique. There is a significant difference between learning techniques and applying them to your game. In fact once you are in the thick of it, executing a technique is the last thing on your mind. Flow drills allow you to practise the flow of techniques (hence the name) and allows you to think of and get to better positions with speed.

Flow drills are utilized in various sports to help with movement, timing, breathing and numerous other reasons depending on the sport. Vast quantities of both fast-twitch and slow-twitch muscle fibres are used during this type of drill. This muscular involvement is not limited to the larger, primary muscle groups, but includes all of the stabilizing structures as well. From the tips of the toes to the top of the head, almost every single muscle is constantly involved during flow drills.

WHAT IS A FLOW DRILL?

Firstly, we should take a look at the dictionary definitions of these two words so we can have a better idea. The dictionary description itself gives a good idea of the whole thing.

“*Flow*” - “move freely from place to place, to move freely from one place to another in large numbers or amounts in a steady unbroken stream.”

- “move steadily and continuously in a current or stream.”

- “motion characteristic of fluids (liquids or gases).”

“*Drill*” - No real need to describe this one, a drill is an exercise. But once again if you look into dictionaries you find interesting variations.

- “military; training by repetition: a type of military training, particularly in marching manoeuvres and weapons handling, that involves the constant repetition of a set pattern of movements or tasks. Education; repeated exercise: a sequence of tasks, exercises, or words repeated over and over until they can be performed faultlessly. As used in teaching military skills, languages, or basic arithmetic.

So basically in Jujitsu a flow drill is a way to roll through techniques in a relax manner and in a constant motion. It is not about strength or speed. It is about using proper techniques and movements; it is a cooperative effort between you and your partner. You need to focus on your own movements and on your partner’s movements, while constantly moving at all times at a controlled pace. When performed well, both partners will benefit from this type of drill. Another advantage of this type of exercise is that you can do very long sessions, because if you do it well you are not using too much energy.

WHY USE FLOW DRILLS IN JUJITSU?

Imagine if the only way you learned Jujitsu was to take part in the typical class, watching the demonstration and then drilling the movement. Then you move on to the next demonstration and kick out the reps. Next you are on to live grappling, fending for yourself in trying to put all the movements and techniques in the right place. Now imagine a period of time dedicated to “flow drills” in Jujitsu. This is where the real learning begins for many students.

For Jujitsu, one of the main reasons for teaching flow drills to students is so they learn how to move their body, as well as understanding how their partner's body moves. Flow drills help them work through difficult problem areas, such as how to transition or escape. Sometimes it is likened to a simple line of computer, *if this then that*. What happens when I move this way? Am I blocked simply because my partner's body is in the way or is this the correct path? If I move this way, will I affect my partner's balance? If I push or pull or roll or tuck or extend, how does this affect my movement or my partner's? What avenues of escape are available to me from various positions?

To start your flow drill training you can do a 'positional flow drill'. It means that you just move from one position to another, working on holdings, strangles, arm and leg locks in various patterns and routines, but remember use proper techniques and do not at any point during the drill lose contact with your partner. Your partner may also move during this type of drill in a slow continuous motion to offer some type of dynamic resistance by his shifting mass, but he should also allow you to achieve the end result. This type of drill is more for working on muscle memory, as sometimes when performing grappling it is hard to focus on what you want to do. A lot of us tend to be too much into the fight and we start losing our objective. Doing flow drills like these presents the right opportunity to focus on something you specifically want to work on.

Once comfortable with that you can move onto a "Randori style flow drill", putting into practice what you have learnt. During this style you and your partner move and move often in a controlled manner from one position to another - sweep, roll, shrimp and escape, be creative - but you do not go for any submissions. You will be presented with the challenge of moving your body through spaces at unusual angles and through multiple planes. You may find yourself in positions you have never been in before and also discover new combinations to transition from one position to another. When you reach a dominant position just hold it for a few seconds and then move to a different holding; but if your partner tries to escape and is doing well, let him go and see if you can counter his moves. Once you feel comfortable with that, you can add some submission attempts. But remember they are just attempts, if you secure an armlock let your partner escape, do not make him tap.

Here are a few different variations on flow drills you can practice:

GROUND HOLDING FLOW DRILL:

While this may be a simple four ground-holding flow drill, it is a great one for kids as it teaches them to look for and move into different positions. After doing this type of drill you may find muscle memory will kick in and you will move into or set up for the hold naturally rather than having to think about it. This drill also has an escape built into it, so that kids realize that you can move during a ground hold and often escape from a good hold.



This flow drill starts with Tori in a Yoko Shiho Gatame ground hold. In this hold toes must be kept alive. The left arm is placed around and under Uke's shoulder and Tori holds on with a hand full of gi. Tori's right hand is placed through Uke's legs and Tori will hold either the gi or belt. Also note that Tori's elbows are positioned down on the mat.



Tori now transitions into Mune Gatame by sliding his left leg up towards Uke's head and placing his knee to Uke's ear. Tori's left arm stays in the same position. While his right arm slides out from in between Uke's legs and is placed beside his left arm to reinforce the hold on Uke's shoulder.



Tori slides his left arm out and takes hold of Uke's gi at the shoulder. Tori also turns his hips in a counter clockwise direction towards Uke's head.



Tori now finishes of the transitions into Kuzure Kesa Gatame by posting his left leg for stability.



Tori now transitions into Kesa Gatame by retracting his right arm out from Uke's shoulder and placing it under Uke's neck. Tori also drops his left knee to the mat and creates a wide stance with his legs to create a nice stable platform.



Uke now tucks his heels under his bottom and takes a champion's grip around Tori's waist.





Uke now arches his back to lift Tori upwards and off balance. **Note you must arch on your shoulders not your neck.**



Uke now rolls over onto right shoulder, which inturn rolls Tori onto his back.



Uke should now be on top of Tori and in the more dominant position.



Uke slides his left arm through past Tori's right arm, thus allowing him to roll Tori onto his back and also get chest on chest contact.



Uke now performs Yoko Shiho Gatame, by sliding his arms around Tori's leg and arm, throws his legs out, drops his hips and keeps his toes alive. From here Uke now goes through his ground holds, then allows Tori to roll him over.

With regular practice you will become more fluent with your transitions from each holding. You may then progress from a positional flow drill to a randori flow drill, where Uke and Tori will start to move and offer some resistance.

STANDING RESTRAINT FLOW DRILL:

What we have here is a set of six standing restraints placed into a flow drill training exercise. The purpose of this type of drill is to teach people that when they attempt a restraint and resistance is met, you can flow with the momentum or path of less resistance and move into another restraint. Once again, this series of standing restraints is making a muscle memory of situations that if trained in the dojo (regularly and over a period of time), when required to be used outside the dojo should become a natural response without thinking.



This flow drill starts with Tori in a standing Hadaka Jime.



Tori places his right palm onto the underside of Uke's elbow and his left hand on Uke's right.



Tori now pushes up on the elbow and pulls down with the wrist, whilst stepping backwards and to the rear of Uke.



Tori should now be free of Uke's strangle.



Tori now slides his right arm through Uke's right arm and places his hand onto Uke's shoulder. It is very important that Uke's wrist is in Tori's elbow pit.



Tori now moves his left hand around Uke's head and places the back of his hand onto Uke's right side cheek bone. Tori then turns Uke's head to his left shoulder. This is the first standing restraint.





Tori now allows Uke to push down with his right hand and release himself from the restraint.



But Tori must still be holding onto Uke's right wrist to maintain control.



Tori whilst keeping control of Uke's arm via the grip on his wrist, will now step in a forward direction with his right leg and start to swing Uke's arm in an upward direction.



Tori swings Uke's right arm upwards and places it down onto his left shoulder.



Tori now applies pressure on Uke's elbow joint by pressing down on Uke's right wrist. This causes a hyper-extension of the elbow joint. This is the second standing restraint.



This is the same move from a different angle. Note how Tori's left elbow is placed to prevent Uke's arm sliding off Tori's shoulder.



Tori releases the restraint and allows Uke to start to pull backwards to release himself.



Tori then steps backwards with his left leg and places the cutting edge of his left hand (little finger down) onto Uke's right tricep. Also, Tori should remain holding Uke's wrist with his left hand.



Using a cutting motion across Uke's tricep and stepping forward on his right leg Uke's shoulder joint will rotate and he will be moved into another elbow hyper-extension. This is the third standing restraint.





Tori releases the restraint and allows Uke to start to stand. At the same time Tori changes his hand positions (as per next picture).



Tori's left hand slides around to Uke's elbow and his right hand takes control of Uke's right hand.



Tori now simply lifts Uke's right arm upwards and into a wrist lock. This is the fourth standing restraint.



Tori now changes his left hand grip and slides it over onto the top of Uke's right elbow, whilst keeping Uke's right wrist in the same locked position.



Tori now pushes downwards on Uke's elbow, becoming another wrist lock. This is the fifth standing restraint.



Tori now rotates Uke's hand in a clockwise direction towards Uke's body.



Tori now slides his left hand between Uke's right arm and body (as per picture) through to reinforce his right hand. Also, Tori locks Uke's elbow into his left armpit.



Tori moves Uke's arm in an upward motion and also rotates his wrist in a counter clockwise direction, applying the sixth standing restraint via a wrist lock.



Tori releases Uke from the last standing restraint and steps behind Uke.



Tori places Uke in a standing Hadaka Jime.

Uke places his right palm onto the underside of Tori's elbow and his left hand on Tori's right wrist. Uke will now commence his six standing restraint holds.

SOLO HIP ESCAPE DRILL:

Here is a simple but effective hip escape from the ground, which finishes off with an attack to your opponent.



Tori starts from a side breakfall position.



Tori raises himself up onto his left elbow, keeping his free arm up to protect his face.



He now sits all the way up, posting his left hand behind him.



Tori lifts his hips up and in a forward direction off the ground and kicks forward with his bottom leg.





Tori then brings his kicking leg back between his grounded hand and foot.



Tori then stands up into a fighting stance.

HIP ESCAPE FLOW DRILL:

Applying the previous hip escape drill into a self defensive flow drill:



Tori & Uke start off facing each other in a standard fighting stance.



Uke follows through with a Mae Geri (front kick) to the Solar Plexus.



Tori falls backwards into a side breakfall position.



Tori raises himself up onto his elbow, keeping his opposite arm free to protect himself. Also Tori is at all times keeping his eyes on Uke.





Tori now comes up onto his hand in a sitting position, shielding his face with his opposite arm.



Tori then lifts his hips upwards and in a forward direction. Tori kicks out at the knee to make space between himself and Uke.



Tori then retracts his kicking leg back between his grounded hand and foot.



Tori then stands up into his fighting stance.



Tori now becomes the attacker and strikes out at Uke with a Mae Geri.



Uke falls to the ground in a side breakfall position. Uke will now start to raise himself up and go through his hip escape.

CLOSED GUARD HIP ESCAPE FLOW DRILL:

Here is the same hip escape but adapted to suit a different situation from a closed guard:



Tori and Uke start off facing each other in a standard fighting stance.



Uke performs Morote Gari on Tori.



Uke drops down between Tori's legs into a closed guard position. Tori uses his left arm to defend against Uke.



Tori starts to defend by sitting up.



He then reaches over Uke's shoulder and moves his hips to the left.



Tori now pushes his hips forward pushing Uke to the right.



The push creates enough space for Tori to retract his right leg. Now both of Tori's legs should be out from under Uke's body.



Tori now pushes away from Uke and disengages from the ground.



Now both Tori & Uke come back to a standing fighting stance position.



Now Tori grabs Uke and throws him with Morote Gari, so that Uke can go through his closed guard hip escape.

With these flow drills you are creating a muscle memory of a hip escape so it becomes a natural response to do when you have been taken to the ground. You can perform both drills simultaneously and even change the throw or take down to keep each other thinking.

BREATHING DURING FLOW DRILLS:

Flow drills are also a very good way to work on specific things, like focusing on your breathing for example. The pace of your breathing is closely linked to your mental state. The mind is at its clearest when breathing is calm and rhythmic. In contrast, it is very, very difficult to think clearly when your breathing is ragged and heavy.

An effective way of controlling your breathing is to use the rate of your opponent's breathing to pace yours. When in a static grappling position, try to listen to your opponent's breathing. If it is at a harder and faster pace than yours, chances are he is using a lot more energy than you, and subsequently he will tire more quickly. At the same time, if you are breathing harder and faster than your opponent, you will probably tire sooner than he will. In this case, it is best to slow your breathing down. This will naturally calm your mind and allow you to think clearly. It will also reduce the overall level of muscular tension in your body. These two effects in combination will allow you to remember your techniques and perform them fluidly.

Also, your lungs are situated in close proximity to your spine, the largest and most complex joint system of your body. The volume of air in your lungs affects their size and consequently the flexibility and mobility of your spine. Here is a simple test you can do yourself: Take a deep breath and hold it. Still holding your breath, bend forward and try to touch your toes. Now exhale and perform the task again. Notice how much further your spine bends. In general, any forward bending movement or movement in which your shoulders and hips move closer towards each other should be done upon exhalation. An example of this kind of movement would be the 'snake' or 'shrimp' escape. Conversely, any action that requires an arching of the spine or which increases the distance between the shoulders and the hips should be accompanied by an inhalation. A good example of this would be a bridging motion. The air in your lungs will set your spine and provide extra support to the bridge structure.

CONCLUSION:

Flow drills are a fantastic way to teach students how to use good technique instead of strength, as is the necessity with many new students. Many schools advocate that the Flow Drill is more beneficial for advanced students, and that beginners will not understand or take advantage of this exercise as much as an advanced student. Many good schools throughout the world practise this every day. However, for a beginner to Jujitsu, do it slowly and carefully, as bumping heads and getting accidentally kicked in the face while doing these exercises are a very distinct possibility. Further advice for anyone who wishes to give this a try is: never do this exercise with your ego; this is not a sparring session.

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