

FREE BEGINNER'S GUIDE

What to Expect in Your First 30 Days of Jiu Jitsu

An honest guide for anyone thinking about starting

INSIDE THIS GUIDE:

- Every beginner question answered directly
- The positional hierarchy explained with clear breakdowns
- 4 fundamental movements with step-by-step instruction
- Week-by-week account of your first month
- 9 foundational submissions explained in plain language

2nd Gear Jiu Jitsu

Laurel, Maryland | 2ndgearbjj.com | 240-786-5553

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The Honest Reason Most People Keep Putting This Off

You are not waiting for the right time. You are waiting for enough information to feel like the first step is worth taking.

That is a completely reasonable place to be. Walking into a martial arts gym for the first time, not knowing anyone, not knowing what to do with your body, and watching people move with a confidence you do not yet have is an uncomfortable proposition. The hesitation makes sense.

What does not help is that most of the information available about starting Jiu Jitsu is written for people who already want to do it. It skips past the real questions. What does week one actually feel like? Is this something a normal person can handle? What if I cannot keep up?

This guide was written to answer those questions before you walk in. Not with a sales pitch. With the same direct explanation we give students on their first day at 2nd Gear Jiu Jitsu in Laurel, Maryland.

Read it through. Then come in for a free class and see for yourself whether any of it matches what you experience.

I did not start training until I was an adult. I had no martial arts background and no idea what I was getting into. The first thing I noticed on the mat was how disorienting it felt to be a complete beginner at something physical. The second thing I noticed was how quickly that changed when the right structure was in place. That is what we try to build at 2nd Gear. A place where starting from zero is the expectation, not the exception.

Kenneth Brown, 2nd Gear Jiu Jitsu

Before You Walk In: Every Question Answered

The questions we hear most from people who are thinking about starting.

Every question below is one we have heard from real people at 2nd Gear before their first class. Answered the same way we would answer them in person.

Q: Do I need to be in shape to start?

No. The conditioning Jiu Jitsu demands is built through Jiu Jitsu, not before it. Every student at 2nd Gear started somewhere. Some came in with athletic backgrounds. Most did not. The pace of early training scales to where you actually are, not where you think you should be. Show up. The fitness follows.

Q: Will I get hurt?

Serious injuries in a well-run class are rare because of one rule everyone follows: you tap when caught in a submission, and your training partner releases immediately. That single rule protects everyone on the mat. The biggest risk in Jiu Jitsu is training with people who do not respect the tap. That is not the environment here. Bumps and mild soreness happen. That is different from getting hurt.

Q: What is rolling and will I have to do it on day one?

Rolling is live sparring. You and a training partner practice against each other in real time. You will not roll on your first class. Rolling is introduced gradually after you have a foundation to work from. On day one you will learn basic movements and positions with direct guidance from an instructor.

Q: What is a gi and do I need one?

A gi is the traditional uniform, the jacket and pants with a belt. Some classes use the gi, some are no-gi where you wear athletic clothes. You do not need a gi for your first class. Just come in athletic wear that you can move freely in.

Q: What does tapping mean?

Tapping is the signal that ends a submission attempt. You tap your partner, the mat, or say the word and they release immediately. It is not a failure or a concession. It is how training stays safe for everyone. Tap early. The joint does not always give you warning.

Q: How often should I train?

Two to three times per week is ideal for building momentum and retaining what you learn. One class per week slows progress significantly. More than four times per week in the early months can work against you if your body does not have time to recover and adapt between sessions.

Q: How long until I am actually good?

Good is a direction, not a destination. Within three months of consistent training you will have a real foundation. Within a year you will feel genuinely capable. The blue belt, the first significant rank after white, typically takes two to four years. The students who get there fastest are not the most talented. They are the most consistent.

Q: Will I be the only beginner in class?

No. Every class has a range of experience levels and newer students are a regular and expected part of the environment. Nobody expects you to know anything on day one. That is exactly why day one exists.

Q: What if I am older or not very athletic?

Jiu Jitsu was designed to work for people who are not the biggest or most athletic person in the room. Technique and positioning outperform strength and speed at every level. This is not marketing language. It is the structural reality of how the art works. Some of the most effective practitioners in any gym are not the youngest or most athletic people on the mat.

What to bring to your first class at 2nd Gear

- Comfortable athletic shorts and a t-shirt
- Water bottle
- Flip flops for walking to and from the mat
- Nothing else. No equipment needed on day one.
- Arrive five minutes early so you can introduce yourself.

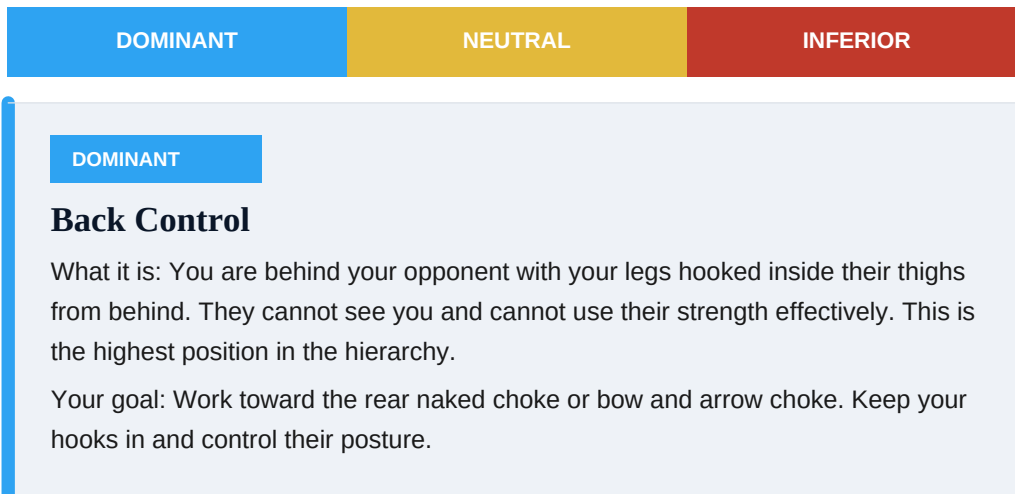
The Map: How Jiu Jitsu Is Organized

Understanding this before your first class changes everything.

Jiu Jitsu is not a random collection of moves. It has a structure. Every position on the mat exists on a spectrum from inferior to dominant. That spectrum is called the positional hierarchy and it is the single most important concept for a beginner to understand.

Here is why it matters so much early. When you do not understand the hierarchy, every position feels equally unfamiliar and equally urgent. When you understand it, you always have a direction. You know where you are and you know which way to move. That knowledge does not require any technique to be useful. It just requires you to understand the map.

Below is a breakdown of the six positions you will encounter most often in your first month, organized by where they sit in the hierarchy.



DOMINANT

Mount

What it is: You are sitting on your opponent's torso facing their head. Your weight presses into them. They have to move your weight plus their own to escape. You only manage your balance.

Your goal: Maintain position with heavy pressure and work toward a submission. Control their arms and stay mobile between dominant positions.

DOMINANT

Side Control

What it is: You are on top lying perpendicular across your opponent's chest, hips to hips. You control their upper body and they have limited leverage to escape.

Your goal: Transition to mount or establish knee on belly. Work toward submissions like the Kimura or Americana.

NEUTRAL

Closed Guard

What it is: You are on your back with your legs wrapped around your opponent's waist and ankles locked together. You are on the bottom but your legs control their movement. This is a powerful neutral position.

Your goal: Attack from the bottom. Sweep your opponent to get on top or submit them from below using the triangle, armbar, or omoplata.

NEUTRAL

Half Guard

What it is: You are on your bottom but controlling one of your opponent's legs between your own legs. Neither person has full control. Both are working.

Your goal: Work to recover full guard or execute a sweep. Prevent your opponent from flattening you out or advancing their position.

INFERIOR

Mount or Side Control (Bottom)

What it is: Your opponent is on top of you in mount or side control. Their weight is on you and your options are limited. This is where most beginners spend significant time in early training.

Your goal: Escape to guard using the bridge and shrimp combination. Create frames to generate space, then move your hips. Do not wrap your arms around your opponent.

“Your goal is always to move up the hierarchy. Inferior to neutral. Neutral to dominant. Dominant to finish.”

- The first rule of Jiu Jitsu

How Positions Connect

The transitions between positions are their own skills. A sweep moves you from the bottom of guard to the top. A guard pass moves you from guard top to side control. A back take can come from almost anywhere.

In your early training, focus on recognizing where you are in the hierarchy. You do not need the perfect technique yet. You need to know whether you are going in the right direction. That awareness alone will change how you experience your first few months.

The positional hierarchy is the first thing I teach every new student. Not a technique. Not a submission. The map. Once you understand where you are supposed to be going, the techniques start to make sense as tools for getting there. Without the map, you are just reacting to whatever is happening. With it, you are making decisions.

Kenneth Brown, 2nd Gear Jiu Jitsu

The Movements: Your Body's New Vocabulary

Before techniques, there are movements. Learn these and everything else builds faster.

Every technique in Jiu Jitsu is a combination of fundamental movements. The movements come first. Until they are in your body, the techniques do not work reliably. This chapter covers the four movements you will drill most in your early training, with a step-by-step breakdown of each.

The awkwardness you will feel when learning these is not a talent signal. It is a repetition signal. Your brain is building a new neural pathway from scratch. Every drill makes that pathway stronger. There are no shortcuts here, but there is a clear process.

1. The Shrimp (Hip Escape)

The most foundational movement in Jiu Jitsu. Used in escapes from side control, mount, and dozens of other situations. Every student drills this from their first week. Here is what it actually looks like.

- 1 Lie flat on your back**
Knees bent, feet flat on the mat. Arms at your sides. This is your starting position.
- 2 Turn onto one hip**
Roll onto your side. Your body faces one direction with your knees drawn toward your chest like a shrimp curling.
- 3 Plant your bottom foot**
Your lower foot presses firmly into the mat. This is your pushing foot. The push comes from here.
- 4 Drive your hips away**
Push off the bottom foot and extend your hips away from the direction you are facing. Your hips slide backward across the mat, creating space in front of you.

- 5 Reset and repeat**
- Come back to center and shrimp to the other side. In class this is done continuously across the mat. Speed comes with repetition. Focus on the hip movement first.

What the shrimp is used for

- Escaping from side control by creating space to recover guard
- Escaping from mount by creating the angle for the elbow-knee escape
- Guard retention when an opponent tries to pass your legs
- Any situation where you need to create space from the bottom

2. The Bridge

The bridge creates explosive space from the bottom by moving your opponent's weight before they can adjust. It works because your hips can generate more force than your arms, and because the directional element catches your opponent off balance.

- 1 Start on your back**
Knees bent, feet flat on the mat hip-width apart or slightly wider. Wider feet give you more base and more power in the push.
- 2 Set your arms**
Arms are flat on the mat beside you, palms down. They help you control the direction of the bridge but do not generate the power.
- 3 Drive your hips up explosively**
Push through both feet simultaneously and drive your hips toward the ceiling as high and as fast as possible. The speed matters. A slow bridge gives your opponent time to adjust their weight.
- 4 Rotate over one shoulder**
As your hips come up, tilt them toward one shoulder rather than going straight up. This rotational element is what disrupts your opponent's base. A straight bridge goes up and comes back down. A shoulder bridge changes the direction of force.

- 5 Follow with movement**
The moment of off-balance created by the bridge is the window. As your hips come up and rotate, turn into the movement and work to get to your knees or recover your guard.

3. The Reverse Shrimp

The reverse shrimp moves your hips toward your opponent rather than away from them. Where the regular shrimp creates space, the reverse shrimp closes distance and changes the angle of leverage. It is used in sweeps, reversals, and specific escapes like the armbar defense from mount.

- 1 Lie on your side**
Start on your side with knees bent and drawn toward your chest, same as the beginning of a regular shrimp.
- 2 Identify the direction**
Instead of pushing your hips away from the threat, you are going toward it. Your hips move in the direction of your opponent.
- 3 Push off and rotate toward**
Drive off your bottom foot and rotate your hips toward your opponent's body. Your top knee drives across your body to generate the rotational momentum.
- 4 Change the angle**
The goal is to end up with a different positional relationship to your opponent. You are not trying to escape. You are trying to reposition your body so the leverage works differently.

I did not learn the reverse shrimp until I was a purple belt. I picked it up at a seminar in western Maryland and immediately understood what I had been missing. It is one of the movements that does not get enough drilling time at most gyms because everyone focuses on the regular shrimp. We drill it deliberately at 2nd Gear from early on because it solves specific problems that nothing else solves as cleanly.

Kenneth Brown, 2nd Gear Jiu Jitsu

4. The Technical Stand-Up

The technical stand-up is how you get from the ground to your feet while maintaining a defensive posture. Standing straight up from the mat leaves you exposed. The technical stand-up keeps your base low and your position protected until you are fully upright.

- 1 Start seated on the mat**
Sitting position with both feet on the mat in front of you, knees bent. This is a common position when someone is standing in your guard or when you have just disengaged from a position.
- 2 Post one hand behind you**
Place one hand firmly on the mat behind and beside your hip. This is your base hand. It supports your weight as you move.
- 3 Shoot one leg through**
The leg on the same side as your posted hand shoots straight back, extending behind you. You are now in a position similar to a lunge with your hand on the mat.
- 4 Come up on your base**
Drive through your front foot and your posted hand to bring your body up. Your free hand comes up to protect your face and create a defensive posture.
- 5 Establish your stance**
Once upright, settle into a balanced stance with your hands up. You are now on your feet with your posture protected and your base intact.

“A movement you have to think about is not available under pressure. A movement your body knows automatically is. That is the entire purpose of drilling in warmup.”

- On why movements come before techniques

Week by Week: What You Will Actually Feel

A straight account of what happens in each week of your first month.

Nobody can tell you exactly what your first month will feel like. But the pattern is consistent enough to describe. Here is what most beginners experience, week by week, and why it happens.

WEEK ONE

Everything is new and most of it is confusing

Your brain is the limiting factor, not your body.

The cognitive load of processing new movements, new vocabulary, and a new environment simultaneously is exhausting in a way that surprises people. After your first class you may feel tired in a way that has nothing to do with how hard you trained physically.

Your cardio gets tested early.

Jiu Jitsu uses your whole body in ways most exercise does not prepare you for. Even people with good cardiovascular fitness get winded in early classes. This changes faster than you expect. Your body adapts quickly to demands that are consistent.

Nothing will feel natural yet.

The shrimp, the bridge, the positions. All of it will feel foreign. That is exactly correct. You are building a new physical vocabulary from scratch. The only job you have in week one is to show up, pay attention, and come back.

WEEK TWO

Soreness arrives. So do the first signs of progress

Soreness shows up in specific places.

Your hips and hip flexors from movement drills. Your grip and forearms from maintaining positions under resistance. Your inner thighs from closed guard and guard retention. Your deep core from constant rotation. This is adaptation, not damage. It fades significantly by end of week two.

First moments of recognition appear.

A position you saw in class one appears again and you remember it. An instruction makes sense not just as a direction but as a reason. These moments are small and they are real. They are the learning process starting to work.

The environment starts to feel familiar.

You know the format of class now. You recognize training partners. The place that felt completely foreign a week ago starts to feel like somewhere you belong. That shift matters more than it sounds.

WEEK THREE

Something clicks. This is when it gets interesting

Movements start to run automatically.

The shrimp that required step-by-step thought starts to feel like one motion. A combination that felt like four instructions starts to feel connected. Your brain has built enough of the foundation to start using it instead of just constructing it.

The mental reset becomes real.

The hour on the mat becomes the one hour where nothing else follows you in. Work, stress, obligations. None of it survives contact with a training partner who needs your full attention. Most people do not expect this. Most people do not want to give it up once they find it.

Your questions get better.

You now have enough context to ask specific questions about what is not working. Your instructor can give you useful, specific answers because you have a foundation to build on. Start asking.

WEEK FOUR

*The foundation is real. The path forward
is visible*

You have a decision-making framework.

You understand the positional hierarchy. You know which direction to move from any position on the mat. That knowledge alone changes your entire experience of training.

Training partners start to know your tendencies.

You and your regular training partners have enough shared mat time to push each other in ways that a stranger on day one could not. This is when Jiu Jitsu starts to feel genuinely collaborative.

The path forward becomes visible.

The techniques that seemed arbitrary in week one are connecting to each other. The system is starting to make sense. You can see what you are building toward. That visibility is its own motivation.

Submissions: What They Are and Why They Work

You do not need to memorize these before day one. Just know what they are.

A submission is a technique that applies enough controlled pressure to a joint or airway that your training partner taps to end it. In training, submissions are always released the moment the tap happens. The nine below are the foundational submissions you will encounter and eventually learn to apply. Read these as an orientation, not a homework assignment.

Armbar

JOINT LOCK ON THE ELBOW

Your opponent's arm is extended across your body with the elbow joint over your hip. Extending your hips while controlling the wrist forces the elbow past its natural range. Available from guard, mount, and back control. One of the most common finishes in Jiu Jitsu at every level.

Rear Naked Choke

BLOOD CHOKE FROM BACK CONTROL

Applied from back control. One arm crosses under the chin and wraps around the throat. The other arm locks behind the head. Squeezing compresses both carotid arteries simultaneously, reducing blood flow to the brain. The most reliable submission in Jiu Jitsu when back control is established.

Triangle Choke

BLOOD CHOKE USING YOUR LEGS

From guard, you trap one of your opponent's arms and their neck inside a triangle formed by your legs. Squeezing compresses the carotid arteries. The trapped arm assists the choke by pressing against the opposite side of the neck. Applied from guard and several other positions.

Kimura

SHOULDER LOCK

Your opponent's arm is bent at the elbow and rotated behind their back against the shoulder's natural movement. Named after Masahiko Kimura, who used it to defeat Helio Gracie in 1951. Available from guard, side control, and north-south position.

Americana

SHOULDER LOCK, OPPOSITE DIRECTION

Similar mechanics to the Kimura but the rotation goes the other way. Applied most commonly from top mount or side control when your opponent's arm is flat on the mat. The lever is the forearm and the pressure is applied through the shoulder joint.

Cross Collar Choke

COLLAR CHOKE USING THE GI

Two grips inside opposite collar points are used to compress the carotid arteries. A gi-specific technique requiring precise grip placement. One of the oldest techniques in Jiu Jitsu and consistently effective at every level of competition.

Guillotine

CHOKE FROM THE FRONT

Applied when your opponent ducks their head or shoots in for a takedown. Your arm wraps under the chin and the choke is applied by pulling upward and squeezing. Can be finished from standing or by pulling guard. One of the fastest submissions to apply when the opportunity appears.

Omoplata

SHOULDER LOCK USING YOUR LEGS

From guard, your leg swings over your opponent's arm and your body weight combined with hip movement rotates the shoulder past its range. Useful as a submission and as a sweep when the opponent defends by rolling.

Bow and Arrow Choke

COLLAR CHOKE FROM BACK CONTROL

Applied from back control using the gi. One hand grips inside the collar while the other controls the leg. Extending in opposite directions applies both a choke and a postural stretch simultaneously. One of the most powerful submissions available from back control.

Four questions to ask about every submission

- Why does this work mechanically? What is it doing to the joint or airway?
- From which positions does it become available?
- How does your opponent defend it?
- What does their defense open up for you next?
- These four questions separate a student who knows a submission from one who can use it.

Day 30: What You Have Built

Not a black belt. Something more useful at this stage.

By day 30 you are not a skilled grappler. That was never the point and it was never the timeline. But day 30 is not an arbitrary milestone. Here is what you actually have after one month of consistent training.

1

A map where there was none

You understand the positional hierarchy. You know which direction to move from any position on the mat. That knowledge does not require any specific technique to be useful. It requires you to understand where you are and where you are going. Before you started, you had neither.

2

A physical vocabulary your body is learning

The fundamental movements are starting to feel less foreign. The shrimp, the bridge, the technical stand-up. They are not automatic yet. But they are available in a way they were not on day one. That availability is the foundation every technique is built on.

3

Real conditioning built through real training

The fitness Jiu Jitsu demands is being built through Jiu Jitsu. The rounds that left you winded in week one feel different now. That change happened because you showed up consistently and your body adapted. That is the only way that change happens.

4

A community that was not there before

The training partners you have drilled with over the past month know you. Not as a stranger who walked in once, but as someone who is part of the training environment. The relationships that form in a Jiu Jitsu gym are different from most. Shared physical challenge does something that most social environments cannot replicate.

5

Evidence that you can handle this

You walked into something unfamiliar and uncomfortable and kept showing up. Most people who consider starting Jiu Jitsu do not start. Most who start stop in week one when it is hard. You did not stop. That tells you something accurate about yourself that you did not know with the same clarity before you walked in.

“The students who get furthest in Jiu Jitsu are almost never the ones who picked it up fastest at the start. They are the ones who were too stubborn to quit.”

- Observed consistently across years of coaching

One Last Thing

Almost without exception, students who reach their first month of consistent training say the same thing when asked how it is going.

They wish they had started sooner.

Not because they are suddenly skilled. Because the thing they were afraid of turned out to be manageable. And because they can now see clearly that the path forward is just more of what they have already been doing.

The first class is the one that matters most. Everything builds from there.

Every person currently training at 2nd Gear had a day 30 that looked like yours. They had a week one where nothing felt right. They had a week three where something shifted. They kept coming back. That is the whole formula. We will see you on the mat.

Kenneth Brown, 2nd Gear Jiu Jitsu

You have read what to expect.

Now find out for yourself.

Your first class is free. No commitment. No pressure.
Just show up once and see what it actually feels like.

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2nd Gear Jiu Jitsu | Laurel, Maryland

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