

Dear Brown Belt

Norm Rolando

This article was written about 1974. I can't remember why I wrote it, but there were 5 of us worried about getting our Brown Belts, (yes, there was a thesis prerequisite for the 3rd degree Brown Belt Test at that time). Maybe I was trying to ease the pain for the group. Who knows.

Please excuse the quality of this copy, but it reflects the technology at that time.

Dear Brown Belt,

I am sure that you are anxiously looking forward to becoming a black belt. I am equally sure that everytime someone mentions your black belt thesis you emit a groan from deep inside; a groan of pure dread. If you are like most of us, writing is not a gift; it is hard work. As a brown belt, you are no stranger to hard work so that can't be what's stopping you from writing it now. Maybe it's because this form of expression has been the most neglected part of your martial arts training. Hopefully, I can help you avoid the added displeasure of having to write it at the last minute. Whatever your opinion of having to write a thesis, it is a requirement. Why not make the best of it? Who knows, once you get started, you might even enjoy the challenge.

The first thing we have to do is to get rid of any misconceptions concerning the length of your thesis. Writing assignment length requirements have always made me uncomfortable. The teacher would say, "It has to be 5000 words," and I would count everyone just so as not to have any extra. Or he would say, "It must be at least 5 pages," which always stimulated me to write extra large. In my opinion your thesis need only be long enough to adequately cover the subject. Content, not length, denotes its worth.

To do a good job you must start well in advance of the due date. Your finalized rough draft should be completed with plenty of time remaining for you to polish it into a present-

able finished product. Let's look at a step-by-step process. First you need a topic. If you don't already have one, the easiest way to get your topic is to carry around a note pad and a pencil for a couple of days. Jot down any ideas that may come to you during the course of the day. Write them all down as they come to you, no matter how stupid they may seem. Don't reject any ideas yet. Also write down any potential sources of information that accompany your ideas. After you have a good selection of topics to choose from, pick one that is both interesting and challenging to you. Ideally, if it requires research, it should have more than one major available source of information. The two major problems you are likely to encounter at this step are; the topic is too general (it covers too much area), or the topic is too narrow (you can't find enough information on it). If it is too general, divide it into subtopics and write about one of them. If it is too narrow and you still insist on keeping it, make it a part of a larger topic.

Once you have your topic, make a rough outline of what you want to include in your thesis. This will include the introduction, the body or main portion, and the conclusion and summary. Outlines are used to help you organize your information in a logical manner, to indicate areas of needed research, and to guide you through the writing process. Do not skip this important step.

Next is the research phase. You must gather all the in-

formation possible about your subject. The easiest way to do this is in the form of notes that you take from your sources. These sources are usually; discussions and interviews, personal knowledge, experimentation, contemplation, recollection of past events, and books and periodicals (magazines and journals). To find written material, your friendly reference librarian will gladly point the way. With the additional insight gained from your note taking, you should next make a more detailed outline. This is important because it will formalize your ideas and main points into a flowing and logical progression. If your outline doesn't flow smoothly, neither will your paper. Remember that the introduction gets the reader ready for what you are about to present. Use it to tell the reader what you plan to accomplish and/or what the main topic and purpose are. The body is the presentation of all the facts and ideas. The conclusion and summary briefly restate the main ideas that you want to leave with the reader.

Keeping this format in mind, take all of your notes and rearrange them in logical order. Keep a close eye on your outline as you do this. Once this is done, read the notes in order and see if they all make sense. If not, rearrange them until they do. This will make your next step extremely easy.

Now write the rough draft in your own personal style. Each person has his own writing style but remember that it must be understandable to your intended reader. The way you present the material also adds interest to your writing. You might

want to provide both sides of an issue, or maybe only argue for your side, perhaps provide information only, or tell it in story form: whatever your style and method of presentation, make sure it flows from one point to the next smoothly and logically. For convenience, write it on blue-line first and double space it. This way you have plenty of room for corrections and additions. After your rough draft is complete, correct all of the misspelling, punctuation, and grammar. Once this is done, set it aside and forget about it for a few days. This gives your subconscious mind plenty of time to work the bugs out of it. You might even ask a few friends to look it over and to make some constructive suggestions and comments.

Next make any final changes you feel are necessary. Don't be afraid to rewrite whole sections if they need it. Then write your final draft and correct any errors. Remember if you use quotes or summaries of other peoples ideas, give them credit for them either in the text itself or in the bibliography.

Reread it and discover that it is far better than the inferior rush job usually presented. I guarantee that you will have a black belt thesis that you can be proud of: One that contributes to the vast collection of martial arts knowledge.

Let's look at a quick overview of the process:

1. Select your topic
2. Make a rough outline
3. Take your notes

4. Make a final outline
5. Organize your notes
6. Write the rough draft and set it aside
7. Write your final draft and title it
8. Make copies and turn your thesis in

Don't try to accomplish this in one weekend. Working on your thesis in short sessions is much easier than trying to finish it in one long session. If you break down any seemingly overwhelming task into smaller more manageable steps, the task loses its inhibiting power. Try it, you may enjoy the challenge. Good writing.

Yours truly,

Norm Rolando