



# Kick Techniques: BASIC



## Kick Techniques

### Tutorial One: Basic

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(Front Kick, Roundhouse Kick, Side Kick, Axe Kick, Crescent Kick, Back Kick, Back Roundhouse Kick)

# 1. Introduction

Welcome to the first tutorial covering kick techniques; this one deals with basic kicking techniques. As an introduction to basic kick techniques, this tutorial is aimed at all martial arts practitioners of every school.

Why, you may ask, should a martial artist of a discipline like judo or aikido want or need to learn kick techniques? The reason is very simple: basically, legs have about three times the muscle mass that arms do, and people often use them in unarmed combat. Even a poorly executed kick has the potential of causing a lot of damage if it makes contact. Thus, any martial artist, even those of throw and grappling-oriented martial arts would be well advised to make himself or herself familiar with basic kick techniques; with each kick type's potential dangers, weaknesses, level of difficulty, etc., and preferably practice some themselves to get a better feel for them. No aikido practitioner would consider not bothering to learn how people can punch just because aikido itself doesn't use punching techniques. However you yourself fight, that's only half of the training you need to effectively use your skills; you still need to know how other people fight if you are going to use your martial skills as a general form of self-defence.

But herein lies the difference and the difficulty with kick techniques -- most people have a much better concept of hand strikes to begin with. With kicks, you need to dedicate a bit of extra time and effort learning.

Apart from that, to develop an ability in kick techniques can complement a non-kick oriented martial art well. This means it may also find use in the dojo if your style doesn't stress kicking but doesn't rule against it. Whether you learn kicking techniques for self-defence or to complement a style which doesn't include them, there can be few attacks more devastating than a powerful, well-executed and unexpected kick. A kick can often pack a force several times greater than a punch or other hand strike.

However, kicking techniques have their drawbacks, otherwise almost every martial art would include extensive kick training. Some of these drawbacks are well described in traditional Chinese martial arts sayings which have been handed down to students through the generations along with practical training: 'Nine out of ten kicks are risky' (to the kicker); lift your leg (to kick) and your chances of losing increase 30% (*'shi tui jiou xien; chi tui san fen shu'*).

However, another adage points to the fact that kicking has both advantages and disadvantages: 'If the hand penetrates (the opponent's defence) but the foot doesn't, that won't be enough to hurt (him); if the foot penetrates, but the hand doesn't, that will be enough to get yourself hurt' (*'shou jin, dzu bu jin, bu dzu yi shang ren; dzu jin, shou bu jin, dzu bei ren shang'*). What this means is that a hand strike in itself may not be powerful enough to hurt the opponent. On the other hand, a kick will be powerful enough, but used by itself, without the help of hands to complement it (either by a simultaneous strike or by preventing -- i.e., immobilising -- the opponent from avoiding the kick), then this can open yourself to an effective countering of your attack.

Thus, it can be seen that kicking has always played a controversial role in martial arts. It has its advocates, who realise its importance and swear by it, and styles such as taekwondo and Thai boxing which are almost dedicated exclusively to it, and it also has its detractors, who point out that the dangers kicking techniques pose to the practitioner can outweigh their rewards. The dangers can be simply summed up thus: you can't kick with both feet on the ground. Once you lift a leg to kick, you are vulnerable to attack and easily knocked of balance if your opponent sees the opportunity. But on the other hand, the advantages of kicking techniques assure that they will always be important fighting skills and the martial artist who chooses not to bother learning them, does so at his peril.

In this article, I focus on what I call basic and generic techniques. Although suitable for the rank beginner as well as those with some experience, I have avoided the obvious title of 'Beginning to Intermediate Techniques'. The reason for this is that a basic technique (i.e., a simple technique), is not necessarily something for beginners only, although beginners must learn basic techniques first. If you spar in kick boxing, you will be aware that very often it is the simple, well-executed, kick which wins the day...while on the other hand, the most complex of kicking techniques, if executed without great proficiency, perfect timing and a liberal dose of good luck, can leave you kicking thin air, or worse still, send you reeling to the floor. I begin with the importance of a proper warm up and the right kind of stretching exercises.



## 2. Stretching Exercises

Whatever you do, don't run away with the idea that you can skip stretching exercises. Failing to go through regular stretching and warm-up exercises is the best guarantee of coming a cropper. Stretching exercises are more important for the lower body than the upper body, for the same reason I mentioned a couple of paragraphs ago: you can't kick with both feet on the ground. So, if you injure your right hamstring, you can't kick effectively with either leg, and, what's worse, you can't even move about effectively. You can't even run away! If you injure your right shoulder, you can still use your left arm, and move around almost as well as before the injury.

This short tutorial will not go into great detail on stretching. Suffice to say that a golden rule for martial arts stretching is to do some warm-ups before a kick workout, including dynamic stretching (stretching exercises similar to the kicks you will practice). After your kick workout, do a little passive (yoga-type) stretching, in which you hold the stretch for some seconds or even minutes. After your workout, your muscles are at their warmest and most pliant; this is the best time to do most of your passive stretching. Gradually increasing your passive stretching ability will translate into increased flexibility for 'cold starts' as well as warm, passive stretches. But keep in mind that whatever your maximum stretch when warm is, your maximum 'cold stretch' will be significantly less. Which is to say, just because you can almost do full splits after an hour's exercise and ten minutes stretching, don't run away with the notion that you can now easily do a side kick above head height. There is always some discrepancy between your maximum flexibility when warm, and when kicking cold. Many injuries occur for just this reason.

Start your stretch workout with squats, and then leg lifts (like doing front kicks, but keeping the kicking leg straight). After doing 'front kick exercises', move to back and then side kick exercises, again keeping the kicking leg straight. Finally, when warm, do a little passive stretching by placing one leg on some object, like a table, as shown in the photos below. The object doesn't need to be particularly high; if it isn't high enough, simply take a small step away from it, and that will increase your stretch. You can do some such stretching before your main kick workout, but save most of the passive stretching till after your workout.

While there is some translation from your passive stretching degree of flexibility, dynamic stretching will have a clearer effect on the degree of flexibility you can achieve when kicking. In other words, the greater the stretch you can manage in kick exercises like the ones mentioned above, the greater the stretch you will be able to manage in actual kicking.



Passive stretching: Raise one leg and put the foot on top of any sturdy item available. In the middle photo, I twist the upper body to one side, to stretch the muscles involved in a roundhouse kick, while in the photo on the right, I rotate the upper leg into a stretch more beneficial for a side kick.



### 3. BASIC Kicks

#### Front Kicks

The front kick is usually the first type of kick students learn in any school of martial arts. It's the most simple and - literally - straight-forward, and the type of kick most non-martial artists will think of first as a 'kick' and be the most adept in without much training, as it doesn't require as much flexibility as some other types of kick.

In fact, there are quite a variety of front kicks, and kicks above waist height will still typically take quite some training to execute effectively. The front kick is also easier to avoid 'telegraphing' to an opponent, as it can be carried out with little upper body movement, especially for low front kicks.



Above: A left front (heel) kick

In a front kick, various parts of the foot may be used; typically the ball of the foot is preferred in the dojo, though with footwear this may be more difficult. Two types of kicks not usually called 'front kicks' are the 'heel kick' and the 'push kick'. The heel kick is essentially a front kick in which the heel is the part of the foot used in the strike. The dynamics are exactly the same as with other kinds of front kicks. The dynam-

ics of the push kick are slightly different than for other kinds of front kicks, but they are easy enough to grasp, just from the name. Instead of chambering the leg, and then flexing the knee to achieve an impact when the foot makes contact, the sole of the foot makes contact with the opponent, then the kicker pushes his opponent away with his kicking leg. Essentially, the push kick is used to do just that: to push your opponent away, to buy time, rather than cause any damage in itself.

## Roundhouse Kicks



A left roundhouse kick

The roundhouse kick was in the exclusive domain of martial artists a few decades ago; now it's become something of a prerequisite skill for any action film star. And, of course, as kids imitate their heroes from the silver screen, so these days, some degree of roundhouse kick ability may be found in almost anyone of some athletic inclination.

The roundhouse kick typically packs more force than a front kick, while - unlike a back kick or a back roundhouse kick - the kicker doesn't lose sight of his target even for a split second, which partly explains this kick's popularity.



As with other kick techniques, there are endless variations, but essentially, the kick comes from the back leg, which is swung around to make the strike, usually with the top of the foot, or the shin. Thus, the kick has the disadvantage of being relatively easy to see coming. That's not always useful, because roundhouse kicks can be incredibly fast, especially when coming from energetic young practitioners with a couple of years of practice behind them. A more effective variation is to kick with the leading leg, but that kind of kick isn't usually called a 'roundhouse',

and while it has the advantage of speed in getting to the target, it also has the disadvantage of not packing as much force. A roundhouse kick in which the back leg is swung around to the front inherits kinetic power from this swinging motion, in addition to the flexing motion of the knee.

# Side Kicks



The above image shows the difference in the way side kicks are chambered from the way roundhouse kicks are.

The side kick is a kick in which the 'blade' of the foot or bottom of the foot is used to strike an opponent, and is combined with a side-wards bodily motion. This may or may not include a step towards the opponent, and the kick can also inherit kinetic energy from this step. It may be made from either the leading leg or the rear leg, which is first swung around to the front before the kick is delivered.

Although there are some similarities between a side kick and a roundhouse, there is usually a clear difference in the way the kicking leg is 'chambered' (see photo above). The knee is brought in towards to kicker's body before the final delivery in a side kick. While this is easily visible, the problem is that this difference is only apparent in the later stage of the kick, by which time it may be too late to defend against properly, if the opponent mistakenly thought he saw a roundhouse coming.

## Right Side Kick



A right side kick de,deliivered with the rear leg

## Crescent & Axe Kicks

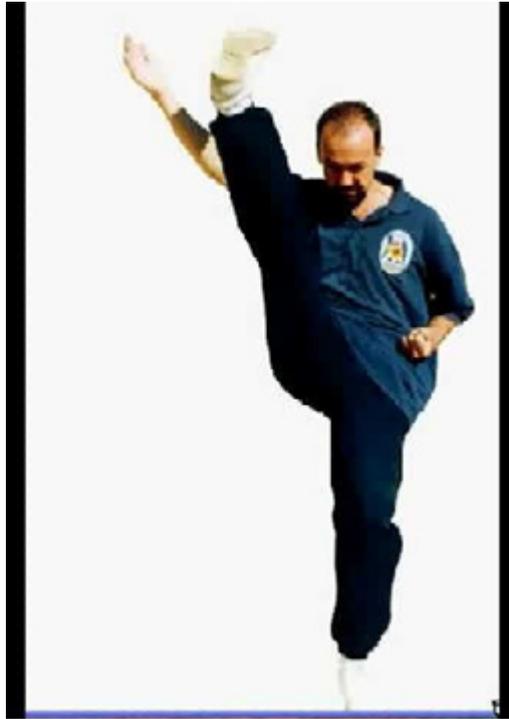
The crescent kick is a kick which describes a crescent form. It may come from the front leg (and usually does), or the back leg, and it may arc from outside to inside (an inner crescent), or from inside to outside (an outer crescent).

Essentially, a crescent kick is one in which the leg stays more or less straight (the knee doesn't bend much), so the kinetic force does not come from flexing the lower leg, but rather from the whole leg. It has the advantage of being less prone to 'telegraphing' than a roundhouse or a sick kick, having a large effective area to make the strike with (which is to say, anywhere on the lower leg which makes contact with an opponent may have an effect), and being more useful in close quarters than a roundhouse, which typically needs a little more space to deliver effectively. Like a 'push kick', it can be used to open up space.



Detailed breakdown of a right outer crescent kick

Closely related to crescent kicks are axe kicks. In an axe kick, the leg is raised as in a crescent (usually an outer crescent) manner, but rather than continuing on an arc, the leg is brought down forcefully from the highest point in the crescent, and comes down straight like an axe! Usually, the knee is flexed in this final stage of the kick, to endow it with an extra force.



Outer crescent kick. The above is an animation of the breakdown image

## Back Kicks

Back kicks are, as the name implies, kicks executed either in the direction away from the rear of the kicker, or with the back leg. The heel or the blade of the foot is the area which makes contact. In practice, there is little difference between a back side kick and a back kick, other than how high the knee of the kicking leg is raised. Both kick types have the advantage of being among the most forceful and dangerous kick types, and the disadvantage of being relatively easy to see coming, as well as being kicks in which the kicker momentarily loses sight of their target. Although that only happens for a moment, it's a very vulnerable moment, and also one in which the target may move, rendering the kick ineffective. The same can be said for a back roundhouse kick.

## Back Kick



A 'standard' type back kick. In the third part of the above image series, the kicker momentarily loses sight of the opponent. Below are two variations, Although the kicker does not see his opponent (or attacker), if he senses the distance correctly, these can be devastating kicks...

### Back Kick: In place, front leg

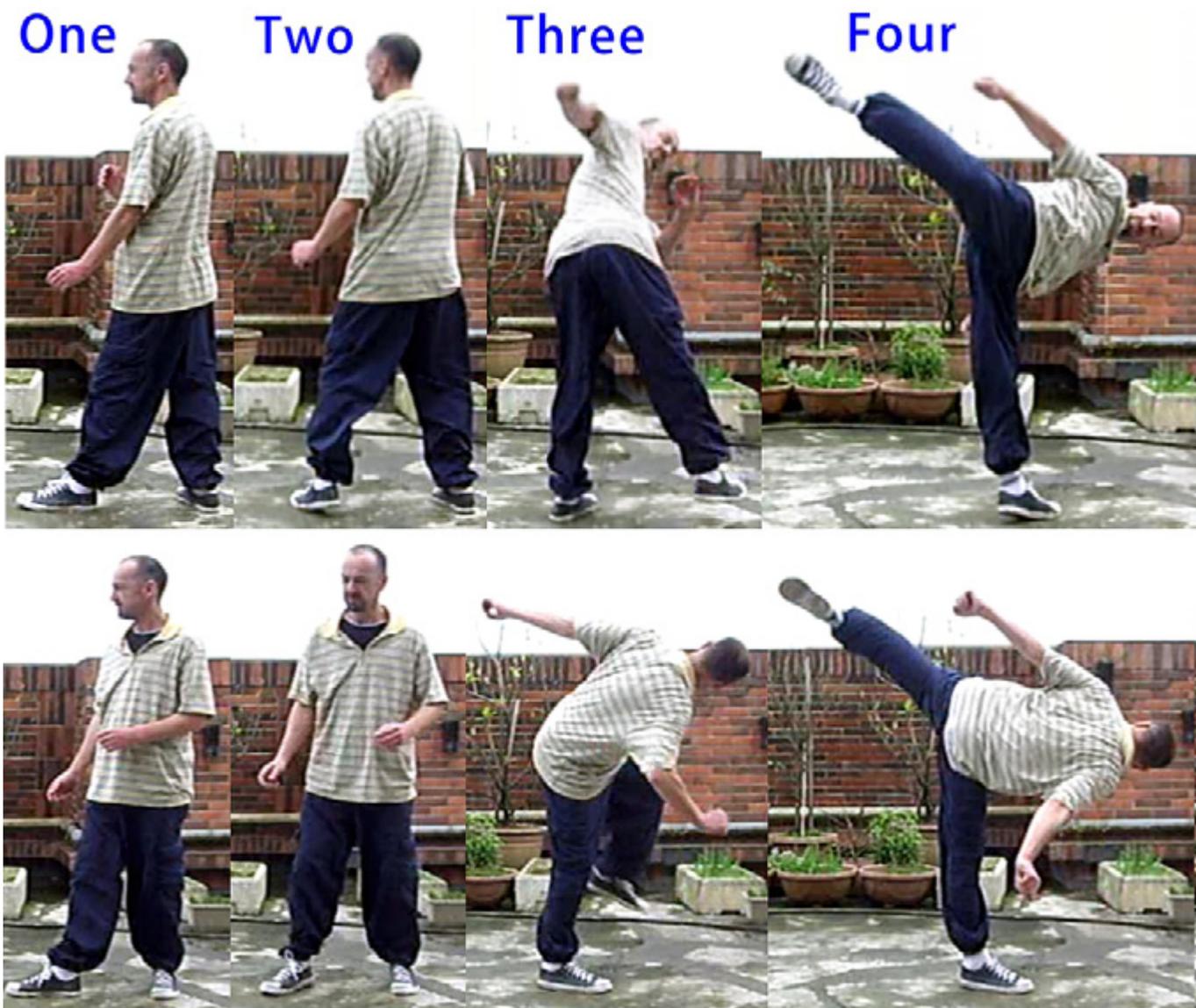


### Back Kick: In place, back leg



## Back Roundhouse Kicks

The back roundhouse kick begins life like a back kick coming from the rear leg of a practitioner (assuming he is standing in fighting stance), but instead of thrusting directly towards the opponent, the kick is delivered in a swipe, similar to that of a roundhouse kick. While the flat upper part of the foot makes contact in a roundhouse kick, in a back roundhouse, it is the heel or the sole of the foot that hits the target.



Above: back roundhouse kicks. The upper series shows a right back roundhouse, the lower series a left back roundhouse. In both, the kick's weak point is evident in the third part of the series, where the kicker loses sight of his opponent.

More often than not, the considerable kinetic energy of the twist of the kicker's torso is used to carry the leg all the way around and back to its original pre-kick position, especially if the kick fails to make contact. As with a back kick, this is often the case, because the kicker will typically lose sight of his target for a brief moment, but also in common with a back kick, if the kick is delivered with maximum force and hits its target with precision, it can be a devastating kick.

## *Principles of Practice*

In this tutorial, we have covered some of the most basic kick techniques. To keep in form as a martial artist who uses these techniques, regular practice is essential. This is the case for all the kicks described above. A good approach is to identify your best kicks and bring them to perfection first. For example, when you know exactly what a perfect roundhouse kick is like and you can execute one without fail at will kicking with your 'better' leg, then concentrate on your weaker leg and gradually bring it up the standard of your better leg. It's important that both legs are eventually equally able, to ensure that you can execute kick combinations equally well regardless of which foot you start with.



