

Practice and Determination

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This essay will be covering the technical side of how board of breaks work using your physical body as well as using your mental strength. This will include your strength of will and many different character components that you will use when perfecting the board break. Indomitable spirit is a key component in martial arts, and it is shown through the breaking of boards.

Board breaks have been an essential part of the martial arts training for centuries, combining the physical aspect of the actual break, with the mental capacity that it requires. To be physically capable to break the board you will need to practice a few things. The first and foremost is technique. You need to break the board not yourself. The second is aim. Without it you are wasting the rest. Third is power. Without this aspect you will not be able to go through the board. Speed comes next. This will increase your power. This is another important aspect because if you are breaking a re-breakable board, it will not break if you do not hit the center. All these are valuable qualities. However, if your mental determination is not as strong as your physical drive, you will again fall short. You must also build up mental qualities such as diligence, patience, self-control, love, respect, and peace. These and many more will strengthen your mental aptitude. Put your physical and mental strength together and you become unstoppable.

Kisul, or technique, is what the board break develops. You are perfecting a technique to the point that you are able to break a board with it. The first aspect of a good technique is the chamber. The chamber is where you position your arms or legs in a way that allows you to get the maximum power from the move. If you do not chamber properly your move will end up sloppy or lacking the precision needed to perform the move to its full extent.

When you start to move you need to be conscious about what part of your body is hitting the board. For example, if you were executing a downward hammer-fist, you would need to hit with the muscle on the side of your fist and not your wrist or knuckle. The same would apply for a foot technique, making sure your hip is fully rotated over for a toes-pulled round kick. You must ensure that your toes are out of the way. Before you start breaking the

board with a technique, you will need to practice a lot in the air or on a wave-master. Another reason for perfecting this is self-defense. If you are attacked, you do not have time to think about how you need to hold your hand a certain way or how to chamber properly. You only have time to react. When you move, it needs to be second nature to you. Board breaks helps with this as they train your body to get used to actually hitting something with the correct technique. This is why technique is critical.

Accuracy is absolutely essential for all things. When you are breaking boards, striking in the right spot is necessary to go through the board. If you have good technique, power, and speed but you miss the target, you will most likely fail. Without aim, it is like swing a hammer at a nail with your eyes closed. If you miss the nail, nothing would have happened except a divet in the wood. You could hit as hard as you possibly could. There is a chance you could hit the nail. However, it is very unlikely, and you are more likely to smash your thumb. When breaking a board, if you miss the target the force will have to go somewhere, most likely your hand or foot. This will leave bruising, and/or could break something important like bones or tendons. And not just on yourself. There are two people required for a board break, the person breaking the board and the person holding the board. If you hit the board wrong or miss the board completely, there is a high chance of hurting the holder. This is why aim is everything.

The third physical aspect in breaking a board is power. Without power you will not be able to break a board. Your technique could be flawless, but without the physical strength to get through the board, it will stop you. Power is not something that you can get in a day. Building up your strength can take quite a while. This is why lower rank belts are given simpler breaks that are easier to generate power with less chance of hurting themselves in the process.

The board breaks that are allotted to lower rank focus primarily on how to get that power. For example, when performing a palm heel strike, it is not just your arm and hand that move. Your whole body needs to move as well. Your feet should pivot, your hand should rotate into the break and your torso should twist forward. When you add a twisting motion to a technique, it integrates more muscle groups into the move. The more muscles used in a technique, the more power you will produce. Power allows you to go all the way through the board.

More speed equals more power. The better you get at a technique, the faster you will become. The faster you become, the more power will be added to your move. The way to get faster is repetition, repetition, repetition. And more repetition, until you can do the move without thinking. However, this can be a dangerous if you practice the technique wrong. When you attempt to break a board with the faulty technique, you will hurt yourself and most likely not break the board. Speed does not equal power if it is done incorrectly. Muhammad Gandhi once said, *"Speed is irrelevant if you are going the wrong direction."* This quote is true when breaking boards. You must build up to speed correctly in order for it to become useful. If you practice speed with a wrong or faulty technique, it will go badly for you.

However, physical strength is not the only kind of strength required in the board breaking process. You must have a strong will to keep going through the board as well as to keep practicing. This points to why character development is key.

The first character component is diligence. Diligent means that you are determined to finish what you start in a detailed manner, and not just getting it done. I have found this component to be one of the hardest, not because it is extremely difficult. It is challenging

because this component is what you need when you get to the point where you just want to quit whatever you are doing. With board breaks, you have to be diligent in practicing them even when it hurts or you have done it ten times already. Being diligent even in tedious or hard situations is challenging, but it will pay off in the long run.

Patience is another character component that is vital in board breaks. You are often told to be patient with others, but have you ever been told to be patient with yourself? Doing board breaks is challenging. You cannot go from a low-level board to a high-level board overnight. You must be patient with yourself in the process. If you get injured due to overexertion, taking a few days off to let your body heal is important in the strengthening process. Bill Gates said, "Patience is a key element to success." If you are patient with yourself, you will get farther than you can imagine.

The character component self-control is necessary when you first begin a board break. When you initially attempt to break boards with a certain technique, you need to know which boards require more self-control. For example, if you were breaking a board with a downward hammer fist, you do not want to fling your arm and hand at the board and hope it breaks. That may work with lower boards, but as you progress in intensity, the boards become more resilient and you do not. You will become frustrated by the fact that you could not break the higher board. You need to have self-control from the very beginning in order to continue to progress. An unknown person once said, "even a little self-control can save you a lot of time, energy, and errors."

A character component that most brush off is love. Love is a very important component as you will not get far if you do not love yourself. If you do not love yourself, you will continue to berate yourself when you are not able to break a board or are struggling with the technique. When you are able to love yourself, you are okay with yourself even when you fail the first few times. Failing to break a board is something that everyone does at one point in time. What you do with that failure is what matters. Can you love yourself enough to let it go and say, "maybe next time?" If you love yourself, you can be okay with not being good at everything and just try your best.

When you learn to love yourself, the easier it is to respect yourself. With board breaks, it is important to respect your body and your mind. One of the board breaks that I have done was a downward knife hand which required intense practice for a week. I then let my hand rest for a couple days before starting again. This is because even though I needed to push through discomfort to get through the board, I had to respect that my body has limits and eventually would break under the strain. Your mind reacts the same way. When you push it too far, it will give up. That is why, when practicing board breaks, you need to give your mind a break and not keep frustrating yourself when you are not able to break the board. Doing something else in order to distract your mind from it is needed. Respect that your body and mind have limits and sometimes you can not get by with pure will power.

And finally, peace. This character component can be used in every aspect of life, not just board breaks. When you have peace about how things will turn out, anxiety will not have a place to stay. This does not mean if you fail to break the board you throw up your hands and say, "whatever, I didn't break it." Peace means that when you do not break the board or

accomplish what needed to be done, you do not denigrate yourself for failing and instead say, “better luck next time. To have peace means to be relaxed but ready for anything, even failure.

Many other character components are useful in breaking boards, but these are the ones I found most applicable. There have been many techniques where I have struggled to break the board at a higher level. This was not because of physical weakness but mental weakness. I would stop at the board instead of going all the way through because mentally I had convinced myself that I could not break it. It took all these character components and more to be able to overcome this, as well as a lot of hard work. However, it was not impossible and was accomplished because I did not quit.

Both the physical and the mental side are important for breaking boards. If one aspect is lacking, you will fail to break the board without breaking yourself. Sometimes one aspect is easier than the other. If this is the case, practice the one you struggle with more. If that side is the mental side, set yourself goals that are reasonable and build up from there. Germany Kent once said, “Your strength doesn’t come from winning. It comes from struggles and hardship. Everything that you go through prepares you for the next level.” Board breaks are challenging. And yet everyone can break boards through practice and determination.