

THE ART AND SCIENCE OF

# STAFF FIGHTING

*A Complete Instructional Guide*

JOE VARADY

9 LEVELS

*Easy to  
Expert*

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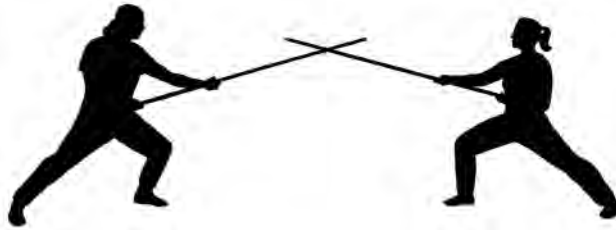
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## Table of Contents

<i>Foreword</i>	xiii
<i>Preface</i>	xvii
Introduction	1
What Is Staff Fighting?	1
A Brief History of the Staff	2
Why Art and Science?	4
Kitchen Kobudo	5
Know Your Staff	6
Intensity	7
The Levels	8
LEVEL 1: The Foundation	9
Fundamentals	9
Stances	10
Basic Striking	11
Understanding the Lines	13
Basic Blocking	14
Evading, Blocking, and Parrying	16
Footwork	17
Figure Eights (Downward/Upward)	18
Level-1 Workout	19
LEVEL 2: Basic Middle Grip	21
The Fighting Stance	21
Combat Striking	22
Range, Distancing, and the Circle of Death	23
Targeting	25
Training Equipment: Target Sticks	26
Combinations	27
Feinting	31
Strategy and Tactics	33
Training Equipment: The Pell	34

Defense: The Wall	38
Level-2 Workout	40
LEVEL 3: Advanced Middle Grip	41
The Double Strike	41
Training Equipment: Target Sticks	42
Hooking Disarms	44
The Push-Pull Energy Drill	48
Training Equipment: The Striking Ball	49
Disarming Blocks	51
Sliding Disarms	53
Shushi's Wall	55
Level-3 Workout	58
LEVEL 4: Basic Extended Grip	59
Introduction to Extended Grip	59
Extended-Grip Basic Strikes	62
Extended-Grip Figure Eights	64
Extended-Grip Thrusting	66
Training Equipment: The Target Ball	67
Training Equipment: The Thrust Board	68
Snap Strikes	69
Training Equipment: The Horizontal Makiwara	70
Extended-Grip Blocking Disarms	71
Level-4 Workout	72
LEVEL 5: Advanced Extended Grip	73
Fencing with the Staff	73
The Change of Engagement	73
The Double Change	75
The Cutover	76
The Beat	77
Extended-Grip Hooking Disarms	78
The Disarm Drill	81
Training Equipment: Spinners	83
Parrying	84
Part the Grass to Find the Snake	87
Level-5 Workout	89
LEVEL 6: Combat with the Staff	91
The Moment of Truth	91
Full-Contact Fighting	92
Training Equipment: The Padded Staff	94
Understanding Timing	95
The Three-Step Rule	96
Programming	97

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Continuation of Attack	98
Blitz Attacks	102
Leaping	102
Flèche	103
The Grand Overall Strategy	104
The Seven Principal Rules	106
Level-6 Workout	107
LEVEL 7: Expert Staff Training	109
Hot Stuff	109
Switching Grips	109
Alternate Ready Positions	110
<i>Fool's Guard</i>	110
<i>Tail Guard</i>	111
<i>High Guard</i>	112
<i>Rear Guard</i>	114
Additional Techniques	118
<i>Upward Heel Strike</i>	119
<i>Overhand Heel Thrust</i>	119
<i>Jabbing Thrusts</i>	121
<i>Poisonous Snake Coming Out from the Cave</i>	122
<i>Fiore's Block</i>	123
<i>Disarming Beat</i>	125
<i>Trapping and Pinning</i>	126
<i>Flying Front Kick</i>	127
<i>Flicking</i>	128
<i>Throwing</i>	129
LEVEL 8: Master Staff Training	131
Close Combat with the Staff	131
Groundwork	136
Facing Multiple Opponents with the Staff	141
Unarmed Defense against the Staff	149
LEVEL 9: The Way of the Spear	159
Intro to the Spear	159
Basic Spear Fighting Strategy	160
Training Equipment: The Rings	162
Unarmed Defense against a Spear	163
Throwing the Spear	166
Catching the Spear	168
Tub Tilting	170
<i>Appendix I: Fighting Physics: The Mechanics of the Staff</i>	173
The Big Three	173
Striking	175

Kinetic Energy	175
Dynamics	176
Angle of Impact	176
Striking Surface: Smaller Is Better	177
Blocking and Parrying	178
The Wall	179
The Wet Blanket (and Subsequent Counterattack)	181
Parrying	181
Lever	182
Uprooting Lever (Second-Class Lever)	183
Pushing Lever (Third-Class Lever)	185
The Kinetic Chain	186
Conclusions	187
About Chris Hall	188
<i>Appendix II: Additional Skills and Drills</i>	189
<i>Recommended Reading</i>	201
<i>About the Author</i>	203

## Preface

When I was about twelve years old, I discovered the martial arts watching kung fu movies on TV. Saturday afternoons were more than entertainment for me; they were pure inspiration. In a short time I was twirling an old broomstick in the backyard, and so began my lifelong love of the martial arts. That was over thirty years ago. Today, my primary passion (apart from raising my two wonderful kids, Cosmos and Kayla) is to train and teach the martial arts, especially when it comes to the staff.

Over the past three decades, I have trained in Eastern martial arts such as karate, gongfu, taekwondo, judo, jujitsu, wing chun, and eskrima (to name a few), along with various Western martial arts, including boxing, fencing, long sword, sword and shield, and several methods of armored fighting. I wrote six training manuals for my core style, Cuong Nhu Oriental Martial Arts, and worked on another for my main Western martial arts school, Live Steel Fight Academy.

I had the privilege of learning from many dedicated and knowledgeable instructors and have had numerous sparring partners over the years. I owe each of them a debt of gratitude for their part, large or small, in adding to my martial knowledge. Combine these many experiences with my love for researching and writing about martial arts training, and the result is the book you are now reading.

In this book, I provide a logical progression of combat training with the staff. It is an interstylistic, multicultural approach that you can easily incorporate into any martial art. Take from it what you can and save the rest for later. Constantly keep seeking new information, both from outside sources and, perhaps more importantly, from within. Keep an open mind, practice, explore, and add to your knowledge and skills whenever you can. If you study hard, then train even harder. The result will be your own personal fighting method with the staff, based upon sound principles and techniques.



## The Levels

My staff system is divided into logical stages of training, both for ease of learning and for developing an understanding of the underpinnings of staff combat. The first five levels include workouts specifically designed to help you master the basic material.

**Level 1: The Foundation.** These are the basics upon which we will build a complete fighting style. This level begins with nine basic strikes, basic applications, and a twirl. The aim is to get you comfortable with properly swinging a staff, as well as learning to safely make contact with a partner's staff. This is the level at which most traditional staff training ends, but for us it is only the beginning!

**Level 2: Basic Middle Grip.** Topics covered include combat striking, targeting, developing combinations, feinting, as well as some important blocking concepts. It is not enough just to read the information. Build the training equipment, complete the workouts, and watch your skills improve.

**Level 3: Advanced Middle Grip.** Here you'll encounter sophisticated, "3-D" concepts on how to use the staff: advanced middle-grip double striking and hooking disarms.

**Level 4: Basic Extended Grip.** This level involves long-range fighting using the extended grip. It is almost like learning a whole new weapon. Combined with your knowledge of middle-grip fighting, your newfound range will keep your attackers at bay.

**Level 5: Advanced Extended Grip.** We start with techniques inspired by Western fencing. Add to this some very effective entry methods, and you will have all the skills necessary to become a formidable fighter at both middle and long range.

**Level 6: Combat with the Staff.** Time to suit up and start fighting! Included are guidelines for full-contact training, plans for constructing your own padded weapons, and tips on fighting. The highlight, however, is my secret formula to success: The Grand Overall Strategy. Get ready to *rock!*

**Level 7: Expert Training.** Imagine a trip to the salad bar. Level 1 is the bowl, providing the basic structure. Levels 2–4 make up the lettuce in our salad, while level 5 is the fork that allows us to eat (level 6). But what is a salad without toppings? Boring, that's what! Level 7 is your complete toppings bar, full of lots of additional techniques to spice up your staff-fighting salad.

**Level 8: Master Training.** Advanced staff-fighting concepts include close combat, unarmed defense against the staff, and facing multiple opponents. You will need all the skills you learned in levels 1–7 to be successful.

**Level 9: The Way of the Spear.** As if your staff-fighting skills were not effective enough, add a sharp blade to the end, and you are really cooking with gas. (Warning: Spear training is dangerous and *not* for beginners!)





## LEVEL 1

# The Foundation

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### Fundamentals

Staff fighting begins with learning a system of basic strikes and blocks. Training at this level is about familiarizing yourself with the staff, learning how to hold and wield it correctly. We are not concerned with combat application . . . yet. The nine basic strikes provide a foundation and framework upon which we can then build a system of practical fighting techniques. To accomplish this, we are going to borrow the Oriental concept of *kata*.

A kata is a sequence—also known as a “form”—of prearranged moves performed solo against an invisible opponent. This basic kata is made up of only nine simple moves. Since we are primarily concerned with combat, we will not be using a formal salute or bow; however, if your style uses one and you wish to incorporate it, feel free to do so.

When performing the basics, stand in a ready stance. Hold the staff in a standard middle grip, with your left hand palm down and your right hand palm up. Your hands are about one shoulder width apart, dividing the staff into equal thirds. This puts your right hand in the dominant position (if you are left handed, feel free to reverse everything). The right end of the staff is called the tip, and is marked with white in the photos, while the left end, or heel, is marked with black.

There are nine basic strikes, divided into four types: downward, upward, horizontal, and thrusts. Each strike starts from its own chamber or load-up, which is a ready position for each technique, not unlike drawing your fist back before punching. Then both arms are used in a pushing-pulling motion to accelerate the staff through the target. For ease of training, diagonal strikes are initially delivered on a 45-degree angle. In the finished position, your front arm is straight but



not locked. Assume your target is directly in front of you. The staff strikes through the target, then stops abruptly on a 45-degree angle past the target, using your whole body as a brake to rapidly stop the staff. Since the staff is striking your upper arms, in the beginning the percussion may result in some bruising. These bruises, which we refer to as “bo bruises,” rarely return with the same intensity, and are often worn as temporary badges of honor by beginners who bear them proudly as a reflection of hard work and dedication to training.

Level-1 basic strikes should be included as a warm-up exercise for any staff training session. Reaching with the weapon will stretch the same muscles in your arms and back that you will be using during your workout. Start slowly, gradually increasing your speed and intensity, all the while keeping perfect form.

## Stances

Stances are ways to stand that allow you to fight with the staff effectively. There are three basic stances you will need to be familiar with: the ready stance, the forward stance, and the back stance. The ready stance is a good neutral position and the one most commonly used when holding the staff in middle grip, while forward and back stances are predominately used when you are holding the staff in extended grip.

**Ready Stance:** In the ready stance, you stand with your feet about shoulder width apart, one foot slightly ahead of the other, with your weight distributed evenly between both feet. This stance offers you quick movements in all directions.



Ready stance

**Forward Stance:** To assume a forward stance, start from a ready stance and slide your front foot forward until your stance is about twice your shoulder width, from front to back. Bend your front knee, shifting your weight slightly forward so that two-thirds rest on the front foot and one-third on the rear. The forward stance gives you more range and puts more power into your strikes.

**Back Stance:** To assume a back stance, shift your weight backward so that two-thirds rest on the back foot and only one-third rests on the front. It is common for right-handed fighters to lead with their left foot in the back stance. Stay low, coiled like a snake ready to strike. Always keep both knees flexed, because a straight front leg can easily be broken by a strong kick or strike to the knee. The



Forward stance

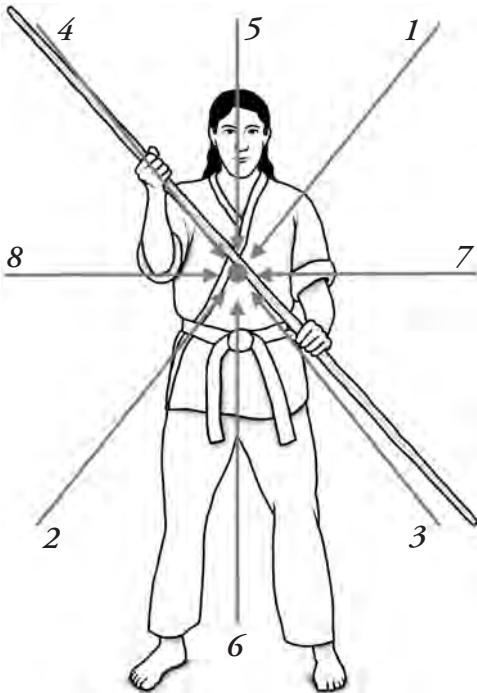


Back stance

back stance is used to hover just out of range of your opponent until you see an opportunity to strike.

### Basic Striking

In this book, I will refer to the first strike as a “number-1 strike,” the second as a “number-2 strike,” and so on.



1. Diagonally downward from right to left
2. Diagonally upward from left to right
3. Diagonally upward from right to left
4. Diagonally downward from left to right
5. Vertically downward through the centerline with the tip
6. Vertically upward through the centerline with the heel
7. Horizontally from right to left
8. Horizontally from left to right
9. Thrust to the center with the heel of the staff



## Understanding the Lines

To become an effective staff fighter, there are a great many concepts with which you will need to become familiar. Two important concepts that you need to understand are the line of attack and the centerline.

**Line of Attack:** The line of attack is any path you could take to strike the opponent. The high line encompasses the head and upper body, the midline generally describes the mid-section and lower abdomen, while the low line generally refers to the groin, legs, and feet. If an opponent's staff blocks a particular path, then that line is *closed*. If there are no obstructions between you and the target, then that line of attack is *open*. A good staff fighter knows not only how to open a closed line on the opponent, but also how to close any open lines of attack on him- or herself.



**Centerline:** The concept of the centerline is common to many martial arts, including Western boxing and wing chun gongfu. When you stand square to an opponent, your centerline runs bilaterally down the center of your body, from nose to navel. Many of your most vulnerable target areas lie on this line, including the nose, throat, solar plexus, and groin. You therefore want to protect your centerline from attack.

Offensively, if you can align your centerline with your line of attack, you can bring both ends of your staff to bear on the target. If you were to turn your body sideways to the opponent, you can only strike effectively with one side of your body or one end of the staff. You can use footwork to keep the opponent on your centerline, while staying off the opponent's centerline yourself, making it more difficult for him to strike you.

**“Expertise shines through this detailed coaching text, which imparts clear instructions, a sense of motivation, and a can-do attitude.”**

—Foreword Reviews

**“A treasure trove of knowledge ... something for every level. One of the most comprehensive staff fighting books...”**

—Michael J. Gallagher,  
USA Taekwondo national  
weapons champion

**“That rarest of martial arts publications ... a fully developed training system.”**

—Chris Baglieri, senior  
martial arts instructor,  
certified CPI nonviolent  
crisis intervention trainer

## The best of both Eastern and Western staff fighting techniques

This book stands apart from other staff training manuals. While most titles focus on forms and twirling, *The Art and Science of Staff Fighting* emphasizes the dynamics of combat.

Joe Varady lays out a comprehensive course of study in nine levels, from beginner to expert. He guides readers through such fundamentals as stances, striking, blocking, and footwork. In advanced lessons, readers learn disarming techniques, groundwork, and facing multiple opponents.

## This book is not just for martial artists

“Our environment is usually full of improvised weapons,” Varady writes. “Staff-fighting techniques can be effectively applied in a self-defense situation using a variety of everyday objects, such as a walking stick, coatrack, curtain rod, floor lamp, hockey stick, fallen tree branch, broom, mop, shovel, or rake.”

Equipped with this knowledge, readers will begin to realize that, in one way or another, they are nearly always armed—and capable of defending themselves.

This book features

- Nine levels of instruction, progressing from easy to expert
- Over 600 photos with motion arrows
- A “nondenominational” approach to staff, utilizing the best of Eastern and Western arts
- A comprehensive, methodical approach to building staff skills

Whether you are an experienced staff fighter or a layman seeking practical techniques for self-defense, *The Art and Science of Staff Fighting* will help you develop the skills you need.



**Joe Varady** is a sixth-degree black belt with over thirty years of experience in martial arts. He has trained in numerous Eastern and Western disciplines, including karate, judo, eskrima, boxing, fencing, and long sword. He has won numerous awards competing in full-contact weapons tournaments around the world. Joe holds a master’s degree in elementary education. He is the head instructor at Satori Dojo and Modern Gladiatorial Arts. Joe Varady resides in Phoenixville, Pennsylvania.

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