



SIMMS

SELF-PROTECTION ACADEMY

PRACTICAL SKILLS. BETTER DECISIONS.
REAL-WORLD PROTECTION.

8 THINGS

EVERY MARTIAL ARTS INSTRUCTOR SHOULD KNOW ABOUT TEACHING SELF-DEFENCE & THE LAW

BY LEIGH SIMMS

Understand the principles
Challenge the myths
Teach responsibly



REAL SKILLS. REAL LAW. REAL CONFIDENCE.



SIMMS

SELF-PROTECTION ACADEMY

PRACTICAL SKILLS. BETTER DECISIONS.
REAL-WORLD PROTECTION.



INTRODUCTION

Martial arts instructors spend years teaching people how to move, strike, grapple, escape, restrain and protect themselves. But knowing how to perform a technique is very different from understanding when it may be appropriate to use that technique in a real-world situation.

Self-defence law is rarely about whether a particular punch, kick, lock or takedown is automatically 'legal' or 'illegal'. The circumstances surrounding the incident matter. The nature of the threat, what the person believed was happening, what options were available, the force used and what happened afterwards can all be relevant.

This guide is designed to help instructors think beyond techniques and towards responsible self-protection education.

The exact law varies from country to country, so this is not a substitute for local legal advice. Instead, it focuses on principles that are useful internationally, while using the law of England and Wales as the primary legal reference point where specific legal examples are given.



IMPORTANT INFORMATION

The legal principles discussed in this guide are educational rather than legal advice. Laws differ between jurisdictions and can change over time. Instructors should check the law applicable in their own country or region before presenting any legal principle as a definitive statement of local law.



REAL SKILLS. REAL **LAW**. REAL CONFIDENCE.



SIMMS

SELF-DEFENCE ACADEMY

PRACTICAL SKILLS. BETTER DECISIONS.
REAL WORLD PROTECTION

1. THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A 'SELF-DEFENCE TECHNIQUE'

A technique does not become a self-defence technique simply because it is taught in a martial arts class. A punch is still a punch. A takedown is still a takedown. A joint lock is still a joint lock.

The same movement could be completely inappropriate during an argument, or potentially justified when responding to a genuine threat of violence.

The technique itself does not make the decision for you. The circumstances, the threat, the purpose of the action and what happens afterwards all matter.



The technique isn't the decision.



INSTRUCTOR WARNING

Be careful about teaching students that particular techniques are 'legal' because they are designed for self-defence. There is no universal list of techniques that a person is automatically entitled to use. Teach students to understand when force may be necessary, what level of force may be appropriate, and when its likely that disengaging would be a better option.



REAL SKILLS. REAL **LAW**. REAL CONFIDENCE.



SIMMS

SELF-PROTECTION ACADEMY

PRACTICAL SKILLS. BETTER
DECISIONS. REAL-WORLD PROTECTION.

2. PRE-EMPTION AND THE LAW

One of the most common misconceptions is that a person must wait to be physically attacked before they can defend themselves. Real-world situations are rarely that simple. A person may be confronted with an escalating threat where waiting for the first physical contact could make escape considerably more difficult or dangerous.

The precise legal test varies between jurisdictions, but the broader principle is widely relevant: self-protection is about responding to a threat and that could include striking first.



IMPORTANT INFORMATION

This does not mean that people should strike first whenever they feel uncomfortable, angry or threatened. Fear, suspicion or verbal hostility alone do not automatically justify physical force. Good self-protection education teaches students to recognise genuine danger, create distance, disengage and seek safety wherever possible.



VERBAL
CONFRONTATION



THREATENING
BEHAVIOUR



IMMINENT
DANGER



ESCAPE /
PROTECTIVE ACTION



REAL SKILLS. REAL **LAW**. REAL CONFIDENCE.



SIMMS

SELF-PROTECTION ACADEMY

PRACTICAL SKILLS. BETTER DECISIONS. REAL-WORLD PROTECTION.

3. CONTEXT MATTERS

A self-protection situation cannot be judged by looking at a technique in isolation. The same action may be viewed very differently depending on what was happening before it, the level of threat involved, the environment, the people present and what happened immediately afterwards.

This is one of the most important concepts for an instructor to understand (and to pass on to students). Teaching someone what to do is only part of responsible self-protection education. Students also need to understand when, why and for how long an action may be appropriate.

The objective should not be to create a catalogue of techniques that students believe they are entitled to use, but to develop judgement and decision-making.

CONTEXT IS USUALLY IMPORTANT



INSTRUCTOR WARNING

Avoid statements such as 'this technique is always legal', 'you can use this if someone grabs you' or 'if they attack first, anything goes.' Real incidents rarely fit neatly into those categories. Teach principles rather than giving students a perceived legal licence to use particular techniques.



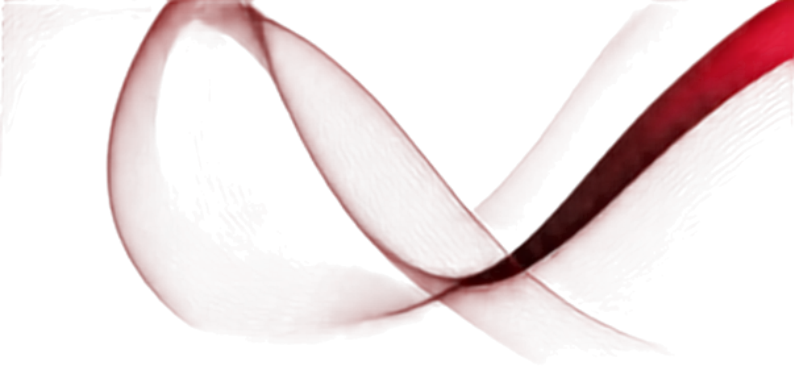
REAL SKILLS. REAL **LAW**. REAL CONFIDENCE.



SIMMS

SELF-PROTECTION ACADEMY

PRACTICAL SKILLS, BETTER DECISIONS.
REAL-WORLD PROTECTION.



4. COMMON MYTHS

Martial arts instructors sometimes hear or repeat rules such as “*you can hit them three times*”, or “*you have to warn the attacker that you do martial arts*”. These simple numerical rules may sound useful, but they can create a dangerously false sense of certainty.

Self-defence situations are not normally decided by counting techniques. The appropriate response depends on the circumstances and the threat being faced. If a person is still in immediate danger, the situation may be very different from one where the threat has clearly ended.

The issue to consider is whether continued force remains necessary and appropriate, not whether a particular number of strikes has been reached.



INSTRUCTOR WARNING



Never give students an arbitrary number of strikes as a substitute for judgement. Instead, teach concepts of disengagement, where appropriate. The objective of self-protection is to get safe, not to accumulate points or finish a fight.



REAL SKILLS. REAL **LAW**. REAL CONFIDENCE.



SIMMS
SELF-PROTECTION ACADEMY
PRACTICAL SKILLS. BETTER DECISIONS.
REAL-WORLD PROTECTION.

5. RETALIATION IS NOT THE SAME AS SELF-DEFENCE

Self-defence is fundamentally about dealing with a threat. Retaliation is about responding to something that has already happened because of anger, punishment or revenge.

Those two things can look physically similar from the outside but can have very different implications.

Imagine someone pushes you, you create distance and the immediate threat ends. If you then chase them down because you are angry and attack them after the immediate threat has ended, you may no longer be acting in self-defence.

The ability to recognise that transition is an essential part of responsible self-protection training.

PROTECT

VS

PUNISH



INSTRUCTOR WARNING

Teach students to ask themselves: 'Am I protecting myself, or am I punishing them?' That question will not replace the legal test in any particular country, but it is a powerful way of reinforcing the distinction between protection and revenge.



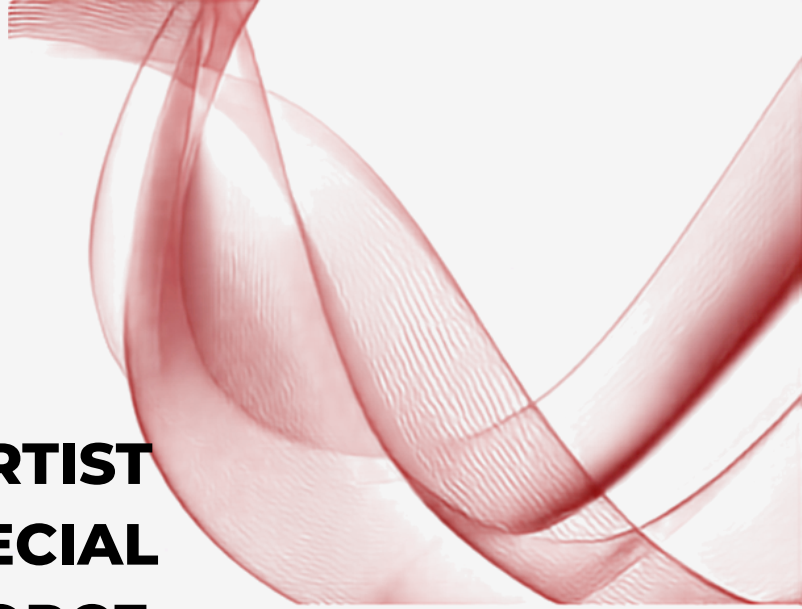
REAL SKILLS. REAL LAW. REAL CONFIDENCE.



SIMMS

SELF-PROTECTION ACADEMY

PRACTICAL SKILLS. BETTER DECISIONS.
REAL-WORLD PROTECTION.



6. BEING A MARTIAL ARTIST DOESN'T GIVE YOU SPECIAL PERMISSION TO USE FORCE

Martial artists sometimes worry that knowing how to fight puts them under a completely different set of rules. Others make the opposite mistake and assume that their training gives them a greater right to use force because they are capable of controlling an attacker.

In reality, martial arts ability does not automatically create a special licence to use violence. Your training may affect the way you respond, the options available to you and potentially how your actions are perceived afterwards, but knowing a technique does not by itself make using it justified.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

A highly skilled martial artist should ideally have more options, not fewer, including awareness, communication, positioning, escape, physical control and disengagement. Technical ability should increase decision-making capacity, not confidence in using unnecessary force.



REAL SKILLS. REAL LAW. REAL CONFIDENCE.



SIMMS

SELF-PROTECTION ACADEMY
PRACTICAL SKILLS. BETTER DECISIONS.
REAL-WORLD PROTECTION.

7. CARRYING A WEAPON 'FOR SELF-DEFENCE' IS NOT A SIMPLE SOLUTION

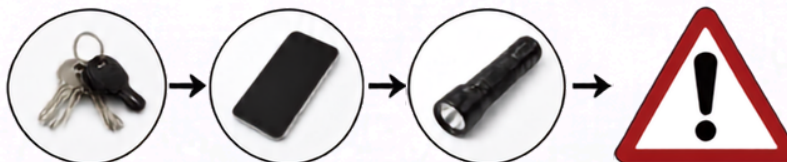
People sometimes believe that carrying a weapon makes them safer because it gives them an advantage if they are attacked. In reality, introducing a weapon can dramatically change the risks involved. A situation that might otherwise have ended with someone walking away can escalate into serious injury or death.

The legal position also varies considerably around the world. In some jurisdictions, carrying particular objects or weapons can itself be restricted or unlawful, regardless of whether the person claims that they intended to use them defensively. The fact that someone is worried about their safety does not automatically make carrying a weapon lawful.



IMPORTANT INFORMATION

In England and Wales, carrying an offensive weapon in a public place without lawful authority or reasonable excuse is an offence. A general desire to protect yourself does not automatically amount to a reasonable excuse.



More capability does not always mean more safety.



REAL SKILLS. REAL **LAW**. REAL CONFIDENCE.



SIMMS

SELF-PROTECTION ACADEMY

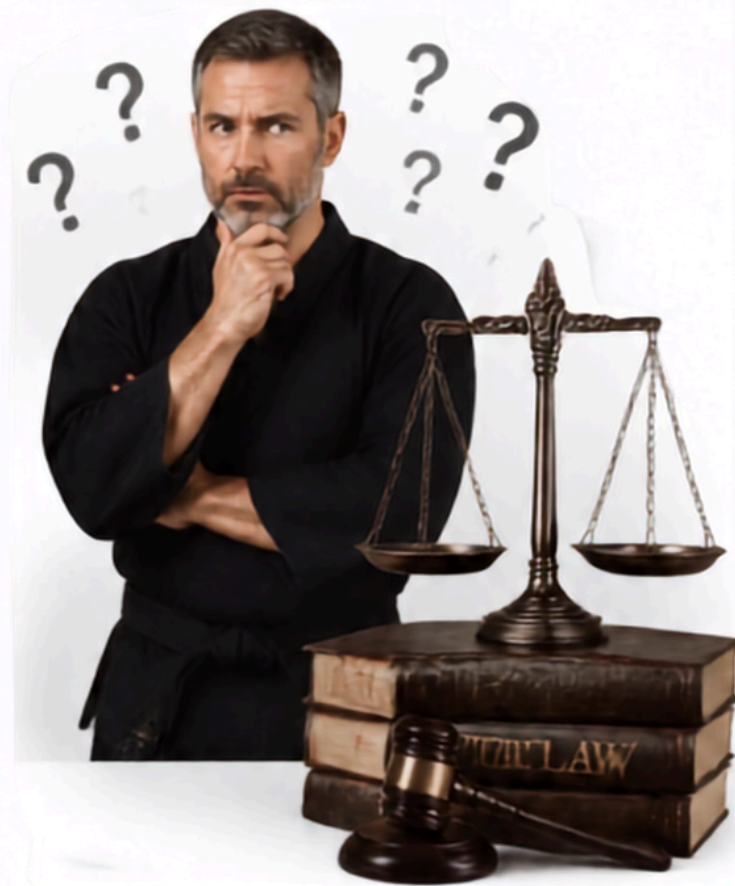
PRACTICAL SKILLS. BETTER DECISIONS.
REAL-WORLD PROTECTION.

8. BE AWARE OF HOW THE LAW INTERACTS WITH TRAINING

Students often ask instructors questions such as, 'Can I do this if someone grabs me?', 'How many times can I hit them?', or 'Am I allowed to break their arm?' It is tempting to give a simple answer within the context of self-defence and the legalities surrounding it.

The problem is that a simple answer, showing a practical physical solution, can easily become a misleading one.

You can teach students how to think about necessity, reasonableness of force, risk, disengagement and consequences without pretending that every real-world scenario has a simple yes-or-no legal answer.



Know your limits — especially when teaching the law.



REAL SKILLS. REAL **LAW**. REAL CONFIDENCE.

ABOUT LEIGH SIMMS

Leigh Simms is a martial arts instructor, self-protection educator and legal professional with a particular interest in the relationship between martial arts training, practical self-protection and responsible instruction.

His approach combines traditional martial arts with modern self-protection principles, focusing not only on physical skills but also on decision-making, awareness, context and responsible application.



SERVICES FOR MARTIAL ART PROFESSIONALS

SELF-DEFENCE LAW CERTIFICATION

Understand the legal principles of self-defence and how they apply to martial arts training, teaching and real-world situations.

INSTRUCTOR DEVELOPMENT

Practical education designed to develop an instructor's understanding and delivery of self-protection.

SYLLABUS CONSULTANCY

Review and development of existing martial arts or self-protection programmes.

BESPOKE TRAINING

Specialist training developed around an instructor or organisation's specific requirements.



FIND OUT MORE

leighsimms.com



SIMMS

SELF-PROTECTION ACADEMY

REAL SKILLS. REAL LAW. REAL CONFIDENCE.

Teach the skill. Understand the responsibility.

FINAL DISCLAIMER

This guide provides general educational information and is not legal advice. The law relating to self-defence, use of force, weapons and personal protection varies between jurisdictions and may change over time. This guide uses the law of England and Wales as its primary legal reference point for specific legal principles. Instructors both inside and outside England and Wales should obtain appropriate local legal guidance before presenting these principles as statements of the law in their jurisdiction.