SKILL DEVELOPMENT

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PART 1
OFFENSIVE STRIKING SKILLS

Abstract

In this article we are going to look at “information processing”, which will give us a better under standing what goes through our opponents mind when we throw strikes at them. Once we have a better understanding of what goes on in our opponents mind, we’ll be able to better plan our striking offence resulting in a higher percentage of clean strikes landed.

Information Processing

What goes on in your opponents mind when you throw strikes at them?
Step 1) Perception skills. Initially your opponent has to identify that a strike is coming their way.
Step 2) Decision making skills. Once your opponent has identified that a strike is coming their way, the next step is to decide what to do about it.
Step 3) Movement execution skills. So far your opponent has identified that a strike is coming their way, decided on an appropriate action to take, now they have to execute a movement to stop the strike from hitting them.

Lets look at how our opponent has developed over a 5 year period to get a better understanding of “information processing” and “skill development”.
Lets look at the very first time your opponent turned up for a kickboxing lesson, If we were to stand your opponent in front of you and throw a crisp fast jab at his face, you can almost guarantee 100% that the punch will land flush on his face, why? As your opponent has no experience (therefor no “perception skills” specific to striking) he more than likely didn’t see the punch coming.
Our opponent has now been training 2-3 times a week for 6 months now, we’ll again stand our opponent in front of us and throw that same crisp fast jab at his face. This time our opponent will bring his fore arms together to block the punch. This time our opponents experience has allowed him to see the punch coming, however his experience is at a level where he will chose the easiest option requiring simple movement patterns to defend the punch.
Our opponent has now been training 2-3 times a week for five years, we’ll again stand our opponent in front of us and throw that same crisp fast jab at his face. This time our opponent slips the punch (this requires more complicated movement patterns involving the entire body) positioning his body perfectly to throw an uppercut which lands cleanly on our face. Our opponents “decision making skills” and “movement execution skills” are now at a level where he can decide on several options of avoiding a punch and execute more difficult movement patterns, even launching counter punches before our crisp jab lands.

What has happened to our opponents "information processing" skills over the last 5 years to bring about the changes in his defensive skills?
Lets say it takes 1 second from the time we first throw our punch to the time it lands on our opponents face. Over that 1 second period, lets say it takes 1/3 of a second for our opponent to perceive what's going on, 1/3 of a second for our opponent to decide what to do about it and 1/3 of a second for our opponent to execute a movement to avoid the punch.
Over the last 5 years our opponents "perception skills" have improved to the point where in most cases it takes less than 1/3 of a second to perceive what's going on, this now gives our opponent more time to decide what to do about the on coming strike and more time to execute his defensive movement.
Over the last 5 years our opponents "decision making skills" have also improved to the point where he has several options of defense for a jab and in most cases can sort through the options and pick the appropriate option to match the current situation within his 1/3 of a second time frame. If our opponent decides to act upon the first decision that comes to mind (as opposed to sorting through several options), you'll find that the time frame in which he uses his decision making skills is less than a 1/3 of a second.
Now that our opponents "perception skills" have improved (allowing him more time for his "decision making skills" and movement execution skills) and his "decision making skills" have improved (allowing him greater choice of defenses and or more time to execute his defensive moves) our opponent now has more time to execute more difficult movement patterns and or time to launch counter attacks.

Offensive Skill Development

As strikers, what can we do to overcome our opponents skill development to help ensure a higher percentage of clean hits?
1) Don't be predictable by throwing the same combinations over and over again.
Being predictable will allow your opponent to anticipate your next move. If your opponents skill level is good enough that he can anticipate, he can by pass his "perception skills" and "decision making skills" allowing him plenty of time to execute counter attacks.
2) Where possible stay away from throwing single strikes.
Throwing single strikes places little or no pressure on your opponents "information processing skills" allowing him to easily defend him self and or plan counter attacks
3) The most successful way to launch effective strikes is to put them into combinations.
Lets say you threw a combination of three strikes, your opponent would then have to use his "perception skills" three times, his "decision making skills" three times and his "movement execution skills" three times over a very short time, this in turn put tremendous pressure on your opponents "information processing skills". If your opponent was to make just 1 mistake over the 9 phases of defense then an opening may appear for you to land a clean strike.

Lets now combine the above 3 principles and look at how to better plan your offensive strategies. We'll again look at our jab, this time we wont throw a single jab as it makes it too easy for our opponent to defend and or counter, instead we'll plan a series of combinations starting with a jab.
(Combinations are done from an orthodox fighting stance).

1) double Jab.
2) jab, cross.
3) jab, cross, hook.
4) jab, left hook.
5) jab, right thigh kick.
6) jab, high right round kick.
7) jab, (then bringing the right leg forward 45degrees) left sidekick.
8) jab, cross, right front kick.
9) jab, cross, right front knee.

Combinations of 2-3 strikes puts more pressure on your opponents information processing skills and when done in a random manner it makes it very hard for your opponent to anticipate.
The above 9 combinations are executed after throwing a jab, you'll need to have similar series of combinations that follow on from all your leading strikes.
Don't execute your combinations in any form of sequence that could allow your opponent to anticipate, execute all your striking combinations as randomly as possible.

4) Faking is another good technique to increase the odds of landing a clean strike.

When throwing a fake strike, the strike has to be convincing enough to your opponent that your opponent actually "perceives" that a strike is coming their way, then "decides" on the appropriate action to take and executes some sort of movement. A fake strike is used to draw your opponent into your intended strike, if it isn't convincing enough to get pass your opponents "information processing skills", it isn't going to work, if however you over do your fake strike you may not be able to get in the right position quick enough for your intended strike. Fake strikes are best used when the aggressor is physically and mentally fresh and capable of delivering a good realistic fake, otherwise it won't get past your opponents "perception skills".

5) Putting pressure on your opponents field of vision and in turn your opponents "perception skills".

Striking low then high then low again or using your kicks to set up your punches or using your punches to set up your kicks in the same combination places pressure on your opponent to use his full field of vision. If your opponents concentration is too focused on the strike at hand, their field of vision may not pick up the next strike in time to adequately defend it.

Conclusion

Now we have a better understanding of information processing, well thought out and well practiced combinations done in a random manner should help increase your strike rate. Although this article was written for striking (in particular kickboxing) the same principles of information processing are still going to be applicable to other striking sports and grappling sports. If you put enough pressure on your opponents “perception skills” (this will force your opponent to take extra time to perceive what’s going on), your opponent will then have less time for their decision making skills and movement execution skills increasing the likelihood of achieving your desired goals.