

# SKILL DEVELOPMENT

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## PART 3

### The development of other sensory skills

#### Abstract

In this article we are going to look at the development of 2 sensory skills, the sense of touch or feel (which will be relative to grapplers and mixed martial artists) and the sense of sound or hearing (which will be relative to martial artists that fight competitively). Most martial artists probably haven't stopped to think about the development of these 2 particular skills, however if you fight competitively and rely on instructions from your instructor/trainer during combat or you are a serious grappler or mixed martial artist, then you might be interested in this article.

When looking at striking forms of combat, in particular how striking contests are performed, two combatants stand facing each other in a stable stance, this stance also allows the combatants to move around freely and launch their bodies and limbs offensively and defensively at their opponents. Between our combatants a safety distance is usually maintained, this safety distance is designed to keep opponents just out of striking range, to launch strikes the appropriate footwork is used to bridge the gap bringing the combatants in and out of striking range. This safety distance not only keeps our opponents just out of striking range, it also keeps our opponents at a distance where our field of vision can pick up oncoming strikes. If we look at combatants that use kicks when striking, you'll find that their safety distance is that which keeps them out of kicking range and also allows them to use their field of vision to pick up oncoming kicks and punches where a boxers safety distance is somewhat shorter as they only have to stay out of punching range and their field of vision only has to pick up oncoming punches.

With grappling contests, combatants fight at such a close range that their field of vision is usually partly obscured by their opponent, this means that often there is a lot of movement going on that the combatants can't see. When we looked at information processing in "skill development part 1", our perception skills revolved around what we could visually see, with grappling contests our perception skills revolve around partly what we can see and partly what we can feel.

#### How to develop other sensory skills

If you have known someone who is visually impaired you would have noticed that their sense of smell is such that when you walk into a room they can identify you from your body odor and or fragrances that you wear, likewise their sense of hearing also is such that when you walk into a room they can identify you from the sounds of your footsteps. What this means is if we lose one of our senses (e.g. your sense of sight), other senses develop to above normal levels to help compensate our loss.

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When grappling, because our field of vision is often obscured, over time we develop a better sense of touch/feel as to what's going on during combat, this sense of touch/feel can come into play when we are in the situation of not being able to visually see what's going on such as instances where our legs are used to control or maneuver our opponent or when our opponents legs are used to control or maneuver us, for example

- 1) You are in your opponents guard and your about to be swept, you cant see this however you can feel what's going on.
- 2) You are in your opponent's half guard and your opponent is about to slip you into their full guard, once again you generally can't see this, however you can feel what's going on.

The above 2 situations are just 2 of many situations that arise during grappling contests where the sense of touch/feel is used and I'm sure you can appreciate the importance of developing this particular skill as a contributing factor in your over all development as a grappler or mixed martial artist.

The best way do develop your sense of touch/feel is to close your eyes when you are going through set grappling drills (in particular, situations where your field of vision is obscured) then progress to closing your eyes when you are free wrestling (grappling with out submission). As our sense of sight is our brains first preference of senses when it comes to our perception skills during combat, taking it away will speed up the development of other sensory skills (e.g. your sense of touch/feel) and if practiced often enough will force other senses skills (e.g. your sense of touch/feel) to develop to above normal levels.

### **Developing your auditory skills**

If your martial arts training have led you to fight competitively, I'm sure some of you will be able to relate to this next section.

When we train at our dojo, hall, gym etc we usually have 2 training environments.

- 1) The quiet environment with the exception of the instructor shouting commands (this environment usually represents traditional martial arts).
- 2) The somewhat noisy environment with music such as AC/DC, Metallica and the theme from "Rocky" etc. in the background serving as motivation to train (This environment often represents boxing and kickboxing gyms).

When training for a specific fight or tournament, it is beneficial to the combatant to replicate the environment of their contest when going through combat drills and sparring, especially if you are the type of combatant that relies heavily on advise from your instructor/trainer while competing.

The development of our sensory skills is no different to other development of the human body (e.g. strength, speed, endurance etc) in that your development is a product of our environment. If we train in quiet environment and we compete in a quiet environment, then during the contest we wont have any problems hearing instructions from our instructor/ trainer. If we train in an environment where there is loud music in the background and we compete in an environment where there is loud music in the background then once again our auditory skills should have developed to tune into our instructor/trainers voice over the music (so long as the music is the same as what you train to).

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The problem arises when you train in either of the above 2 training environments and you compete in an environment where there is lots of crowd noise. The question is how do you pick out and concentrate on 1 voice over hundreds if not thousands of other voices during combat? (Keeping in mind you need to be focused 100% on the task at hand).

You need to make your training environment the same as the environment you compete in by recording crowd noise and playing it in the weeks/months leading up to your fight/tournament. Ideally your trainer would position them selves approximately the same distance away from you as they would be at ringside (remember your instructors/trainers voice is still going to be one of the closest and therefor one of the clearest voices at ring side), initially the volume of the recorded crowd noise would be quiet, as you get use to the crowd noise and your instructors/trainers voice becomes clearer, you would increase the volume in stages until it replicates the volume you would expect at your contest.

Continually tuning into and listening to your instructors/trainers voice over crowd noise will help your auditory skills develop to the point where they can identify and concentrate on that one voice (the voice of your instructor/trainer) over all the other voices.

If you're a grappler then you have the added advantage of being able to close your eyes at times during training with crowd noise in the background, this will even further enhance your sense of hearing over crowd noise.