

# Jeet Kune Do Techniques: Ted Wong Shows You How to Fix 14 Mistakes

by Robert W. Young

Photos by Thomas Sanders



Like the people who run most magazines, we at Black Belt love to look at surveys — in particular, surveys that tell us what you want to read. Back in the 1970s, those surveys told us you were interested in kung fu self-defense moves and [jeet kune do](#) moves.

In the '80s, it was [taekwondo](#) techniques, [ninjutsu](#) techniques and jeet kune do techniques. In the '90s, it was [kenpo](#), [Brazilian jiu-jitsu](#) and jeet kune do. In the 2000s, it's been the [mixed martial arts](#) and — you guessed it — jeet kune do.

To serve up an article about the one fighting art that has remained on everyone's radar ever since [Bruce Lee](#) began showcasing it in movies, we talked with [Ted Wong](#), the man many claim was Bruce Lee's No. 1 disciple. In 2006, Ted Wong was inducted into the Black Belt Hall of Fame as Man of the Year for his ongoing efforts to propagate JKD around the world. Who better to turn to for advice on fixing the mistakes students make in their jeet kune do techniques?

Sadly, Ted Wong passed away on November 24, 2010. Before his passing, however, he shared with us the 14 mistakes he encountered most often and offered advice from his decades of experience.

## Jeet Kune Do Techniques Mistake #1: Wrong Origins

Not all aspects of JKD punching stem from [wing chun](#) kung fu, Ted Wong says. "Much of the JKD being taught today is based on wing chun structures. I have a lot of respect for wing chun, but it's not JKD. In fact, the majority of Bruce Lee's notes in [Tao of Jeet Kune Do](#) are from boxing and fencing.

"One of the most important phrases in his notes and in the Tao comes from a boxing book: 'The essence of fighting is the art of moving at the right time.' But you have to move and think like a fencer because mobility is the key in JKD or any fighting art."

## Jeet Kune Do Techniques Mistake #2: Wrong Balance

Bruce Lee taught that the key to balance is having your head positioned vertically over the line that connects your feet, Ted Wong says. "If it's not and your opponent forces you to move backward, you have nowhere to go while staying balanced."

Even worse, you can't follow up when your balance is off. You're basically limited to your initial jeet kune do moves, be it a punch or a kick, because you're not in a position to throw another one with any power, he says.

In some instances — specifically, when your opponent is backing up after your first strike — you'll need to pursue him with follow-up shots. That's when you really have to keep your head over the line between your feet so you can quickly close the distance.

## Jeet Kune Do Techniques Mistake #3: Wrong Stance

Bruce Lee developed the JKD stance for a reason: It serves a fighter well in the greatest variety of situations. All the more reason not to abandon it as you face different opponents — a grappler, for instance.

“If you make your stance too wide, you cannot move,” Ted Wong says. “A grappler will pick you up and throw you to the floor. If you keep the proper stance while your opponent shoots for your front leg, however, you can quickly move back and hit him.”

Remember to keep your balance forward for maximum power, he adds.

In order to execute jeet kune do moves correctly, you need the proper JKD stance. To construct the right stance, imagine a line between you and your opponent. The toe of your front foot should be on that line, as should the arch of your rear foot. An isosceles triangle is formed with your lead toe at the top and your rear heel and rear toe at the bottom vertexes.

“If you have an open stance like a boxer, that line will point away from your opponent, and you’ll lose your power structure,” Ted Wong says. “One key part of JKD is, it’s not how fast you hit or how much muscle you have; it’s that you have that power structure. You have to keep it intact no matter how or where you move. When you’re off, you lose power and mobility.”

#### **Jeet Kune Do Techniques Mistake #4: Wrong Understanding**

You can’t rely on one or two forces in jeet kune do moves. You need three, Ted Wong says. “The first is vertical. Your stance is slightly down to begin with, and then you strike as you rise. It’s normally used in the uppercut.

“The second force is linear, which means you’re moving forward. It’s what powers the lead-hand strike.” Obviously, footwork is important to create that forward motion.

“The third is rotational,” Ted Wong says. It emanates from twisting your hips and is the force that powers the hook punch and hook kick.

#### **Jeet Kune Do Techniques Mistake #5: Wrong Distance**

“Perhaps the most common mistake people make when learning JKD is [related to] distance, Ted Wong says. “If you have the wrong distance, you cannot get your technique or combination off, and you might get hit. So it’s critical to be able to judge distance.”

The philosophy, which derives from fencing, is simple: Stay far enough out of reach to prevent your foe from touching you with a punch or kick — and from being able to lean and touch you. If he wants to make contact, he’ll have to take a step. Obviously, you’ll have to do the same to reach him, but because you’re trained to close that gap, it’s easier for you.

#### **Jeet Kune Do Techniques Mistake #6: Wrong Timing**

“Nobody throws a punch like in JKD,” Ted Wong claims. And that’s why it’s so hard for the average martial artist to master jeet kune do techniques. When developing timing in your jeet kune do moves, Ted Wong advocates memorizing a motto from fencing: Hand before foot always.

“You can see reference to it in the Tao,” he says. “Your hand moves before your feet move. It comes from Aldo Nadi, who was a four-time Olympic medalist in fencing. It enables you to bridge the gap and land the shot.”

#### **Jeet Kune Do Techniques Mistake #7: Wrong Defense**

Too many students lean away from their opponent to avoid a punch. Ted Wong calls the remedy to this mistake “half-half sharing.” Instead of merely leaning, your upper body is angled backward to cover half the distance needed for your evasive movement and your footwork covers the other half.

That gives you a margin of safety, and it doesn't leave you out of range or off-balance, either of which could preclude a counterattack, he says.

### **Jeet Kune Do Techniques Mistake #8: Wrong Flow**

Another mistake beginners make is separating their forward step from their lead-hand strike — in essence, they step, plant their foot on the ground and then punch. It's way too slow, Ted Wong says.

The preferred way to execute jeet kune do moves is to make sure that when you land your blow, your front foot isn't on the ground yet, Ted Wong says. "When you hit, it's one, two, three. One is your fist hitting his face, two is your front foot hitting the ground and three is your rear foot hitting the ground after the step."

### **Jeet Kune Do Techniques Mistake #9: Wrong Power Source**

The power of your jeet kune do moves should come from your rear leg, not from your arms. "You channel the power from your back leg through your body and into your punch," Ted Wong says.

### **Jeet Kune Do Techniques Mistake #10: Wrong Angles**

Jeet kune do combat isn't just a back-and-forth exchange of blows. It's two-dimensional. That second dimension comes from moving off to the side when you're confronted by an attack.

"Angling can put you in a safer position to counter from," Ted Wong says. "For example, at the same time you move in for a punch to counter your opponent's punch, you angle to the outside of his arm so he can't hit you with his counterattack. It's a built-in safety."

### **Jeet Kune Do Techniques Mistake #11: Wrong Approach**

In JKD, you shouldn't just step toward your opponent and try to score with a punch, Ted Wong says. Even if you execute the attack correctly, success is hard to come by because he can react before you land the shot.

The right way to enter is with a stop-kick — for example, using your lead leg to attack his lead leg or body, whether he's moving forward or not. Then you launch your punch as your front foot comes down. Make sure to angle off to the outside as you strike, Ted Wong adds.

### **Jeet Kune Do Techniques Mistake #12: Wrong Punching**

Many martial artists throw the rear-hand punch while their fist is vertical, but that creates less than optimal bone alignment, Ted Wong says. The right way according to JKD is to turn your fist so your elbow is pointing slightly up — so your pinkie knuckle is higher than your index-finger knuckle. That orientation aligns the bones in your forearm with the ones in your hands for maximum structural integrity.

It also raises your upper arm, which protects your chin. In contrast, if you punch with your fist vertical, your upper arm will be lower, thus exposing your chin to a counterattack.

### **Jeet Kune Do Techniques Mistake #13: Wrong Kicking**

One of the most serious mistakes Ted Wong has identified involves practitioners who lean backward while kicking. It's bad for many reasons, he says. First, you sacrifice power whenever you lean backward. Second, you probably won't have a chance to land more than one technique because your arms can't reach him from your compromised position. "It's a one-shot deal for you," he says.

Third, you might fall — more than a few fighters have taken a tumble in the ring or on the street because they're off-balance after such a technique. Fourth, if you have to struggle to avoid falling, you could very well find yourself hopping backward to regain your balance, and that's not good.

In lieu of leaning in your jeet kune do moves, you should keep your balance forward as required by the JKD stance.

#### **Jeet Kune Do Techniques Mistake #14: Wrong Reaching**

Punching is a highly effective subset of Bruce Lee's art, but it's often sabotaged when beginners lean too far forward to hit in their jeet kune do moves. "In JKD, we start from farther back — just like in fencing — so if all you're going to do is lean, you won't make it," Ted Wong says. "It's too far, which is why footwork is important to cover the distance.

"In boxing, it all takes place within arm's reach. I touch you and you touch me. But in fencing, if I touch you and you touch me, we both get killed. It's about who can bridge the gap and get in quicker to score. JKD students think the same way."