



GRAPPLING CONCEPTS LESSON 15: Posture Under Fire

Welcome to Lesson 15: Posture Under Fire. The last two weeks we covered posture in the guard, which is a 'neutral' position. (If you have me in your guard, then we're basically equal. If I have you in my guard, we're basically equal.)

If you haven't already done so, go to www.beginningBJJ.com and sign up for that free program and read the book "A Roadmap for BJJ" which discusses the hierarchy of positions in more detail.)



The concept of posture can be confusing at first because it means different things depending on whether you're in someone's closed or open guard, or pinned under mount or side control.

To simplify things, let's go back to the definition of posture as

"a way to position your body that will minimize your opponent's ability to attack you with submissions, sweeps, or positional improvements; while maximizing your ability to set up your own moves."

Setting up moves from the bottom generally means *making* space so that I can get my legs into play, stand up, or scramble - all which will improve my position.

If I'm on top or attacking, then 80% to 90% of the time I'll be trying to *remove* any space between me and my opponent.



We can't cover posture for every variation of every bad position. But what we can do is go through a couple of the more common bad positions and discuss some of the options that are open to you.

I'll give you some useful hints, point out some important mistakes to avoid, and get you thinking so that you'll be able to start applying the concepts to other situations.

SIDE CONTROL

Helping out today is my friend and training partner, Jason Parry, and we're going to start with side control.

If I'm trapped in side mount, the worst posture possible is flat on my back with my legs straight out and my arms straight up.



NOT good side control posture...

If I'm in that type of posture then my arms *aren't* protecting my neck, in fact I'm begging my opponent to lock them. My legs aren't doing anything to block his mount or knee mount - he can do whatever he wants.



This kind of posture (straight legs, arms stretched out in front) actually has a name: it's known to the medical community as "decerebrate posture" and often occurs when someone gets badly knocked out, or sustains a spinal or brain injury. You do NOT want decerebrate posture, whether you're pinned, or after getting punched in the head.

What you actually want is a position that I call "advanced fetal posture", where I'm curled up on my side with my elbow touching my knee.



This would be better posture!

It can take some work to get to this position from side control. I have to block and push with both my elbow and knee to create enough space to bring them together, which will form a shield along the side of my body that keeps my opponent's body away from mine.

I also want to be on my side, for at least two reasons:

- 1) It's easier for me to breathe and bear his weight.
- 2) It's easier to get my knees and legs in to create space or regard.



**Generally you want to face your opponent,
NOT turn away from him like this.**

Once I'm on my side, facing him, I bring up my right leg and put the bottom of my foot against the side of my left knee.



Proper foot positioning when trapped in side mount.

Holding your feet like this accomplishes two things:

- 1) It blocks his mount, and
- 2) Your knee is ready to insert between your bodies if he gives you any kind of room.



Spontaneous appearance of space is unlikely if you're rolling with a skilled grappler, but in MMA or a self-defense situation, it may happen when he backs up from side control to start throwing strikes.

NOTE: A common mistake is to lazily lay my right ankle across my left knee. This position exposes my right leg to all kinds of footlocks. The proper thing to do is to press the sole of my right foot against the side of my left knee.



Now we'll look at hand position when you're trapped in side mount.

A lot depends on whether or not your opponent is crossfacing you by having his arm under your head and driving his shoulder into your face.



The Crossface: his left arm is under my head and his left shoulder is driving into my face.



If he is crossfacing me then one option is to use the bottom 1/3 of my left elbow to push his face away.



Pushing his face away with my forearm (regardless of whether his face is looking up or down)

I use the bottom part of my forearm because it's hard and bony and because it uses less triceps strength.

My other (right) forearm pushes in to the crook of his left hip - again using the bottom 1/3 of the forearm.

From here I can push with both forearms, take some pressure off of my face and create room to set up my escapes.



Pushing with both forearms



The other arm position I often use when he has the crossface is to insert my left arm under his right armpit.



Once I achieve this, I DO NOT hang out here. I immediately do a massive bridge and start trying to escape.



Capitalizing on my left arm's position to bridge and escape

Both these arm positions (forearm against the face, arm under the armpit) are good because it's hard for Jason to attack my arm.

Conversely, if my left arm is between Jason's head and right shoulder, he can attack with a straight armlock, or a spinning armbar. He has many options...





As an aside, a while ago another high-level BJJ guy made an instructional DVD that covered some good escapes from side mount when your arm is in that bad position. I then saw some white belts who had watched the video purposely leaving good posture and putting their arm into that bad position. They were following what they perceived to be his 'advice', trying to get into bad position to use those last-ditch techniques to escape.

Of course you want to know what to do if you end up in bad posture, but you should never go there on purpose (except as part of a very specific training plan).

Much of the pain and suffering in side mount comes from the crossface. So it's always good to nullify that if you can.

One position I like quite a bit is sort of a Thai boxing position. I have my arms up with my forearms are pushing against his left armpit and left hip.



'Thai Boxing' posture.

This is a great position because it's difficult for him to crossface. At the same time I can push him and create lots of room to escape, and I'm not giving him any easy chokes or armlocks.

This is Lesson 15 from the Online Grappling Concepts Course: www.grapplearts.tv



This leads to another form of posture to counter the crossface: the "X-block" posture.



The X Block in Karate...

...and in grappling.

If I'm X blocking his arm when I'm pinned in sidemount, it makes it very hard for him to hook onto my head. He also doesn't have any easy armlocks or chokes, and it's hard for him to get his arm out without creating enough space for me to reguard.

So that covers my 4 preferred arm positions for side control:

1. Blocking the face and the hip
2. Underhooking the far armpit
3. Thai boxing position
4. X-block





FULL MOUNT POSTURE

Dealing with being mounted is very different depending on whether you're training traditional BJJ with a gi, no-gi submission grappling, or MMA.

With the gi, protecting your neck is very important because your opponent has a whole family of collar chokes at his disposal.

Without the gi, the arms become more vulnerable.

And in MMA, your opponent doesn't need to choke or lock my arms, he can just drop punches and elbows.

So you have to adapt to the situation you're in.



We'll start from a submission grappling/Brazilian jiu-jitsu point of view. For most of my jiu-jitsu career, I was doing the basic elbow knee escape incorrectly! Rather than pressing my left leg to the floor, I was lifting it slightly off the ground.



Legs in good posture



Legs in bad posture



With my leg lifted like this, all my opponents needed to do to shut down my elbow knee escapes was to bring one foot underneath my leg. This completely killed my escape.

The big change for me came when I realized what was going on and started turning my leg slightly outwards and pressing it flat to the mat. This way he can't get his foot underneath and I can create the space I need to start working on my escape.

For my basic mounted posture I don't want to be flat on my back. If I'm doing the escape to my left, I want to be slightly turned to the left.

My right leg is in with my foot to my butt so that he can't grapevine it.

My left leg is turned out and pressed flat to the mat.

I also want my arms tight to my body, because generally speaking, a straight arm is a locked arm.



Sidemount posture: ready to shrimp and/or bridge



It's also good to frame your arms (i.e. hold your own wrist).

If I'm framing by and grabbing my bottom wrist with my top hand, then Jason can easily break my hands apart with a sharp tug upwards.

It's much stronger to frame by grabbing my top wrist with my bottom hand. Now that it's harder for him to break my hands apart, it's also harder for him to armlock me or stop me from escaping.



Weak framing grip



Strong framing grip

Things change when we're talking about MMA or self defense. Because striking is involved, I might initially adopt a posture for survival.



Bridging, then bearhugging, to achieve temporary control.

This is Lesson 15 from the Online Grappling Concepts Course: www.grapplearts.tv



I'm going to bridge to knock him forwards, lock myself as high on his body as possible, and bury my face in his chest. Note that the higher I lock onto his body, the more I restrict his arm motion and his ability to punch me.



OK MMA posture



**Better posture
(hands higher)**

This is NOT a long-term strategy; hugging around his body is what I do if I get punched, fall down, my opponent jumps to mount, and I need a second to get my head together.

From here, 99% of guys will try to push your head back down to the ground. As soon as that happens, I initiate an escape, such as pushing his hips away, shrimping *hard* and creating space to put him back in my guard.



Head getting smeared...



... explosive shrimp!



Notice that during that escape I did a supposed 'no-no'. I stiff-armed Jason.



The reason that it worked was that I was stiff-arming his hips.

In almost any position - mount, in his guard, side mount, etc. - if you stiff arm the chest then you're vulnerable to the armbar.

So if you ever stiff arm someone, make sure you push at their hips. The lower on their body and the closer to their hips that you stiff-arm them, then the safer you are.

Here's an example of stiff arming someone when you're trapped mount.

If his weight is a bit too far forward then I put my hands on his hips (or grab his belt) and bridge, doing a 'cheating' bench press, pushing him over my head.



As long as I bench press him *at his hips*, it's hard for him to armbar me. Now I keep my arms locked out straight and drop my hips.





From there, I can swing my legs towards him to reguard or start going for leglocks.



So in summary, the basic mount survival posture has your:

- Arms bent
- Arms framing
- One elbow down to the ground
- One leg flat on the floor with foot turned out
- The other heel tight to your butt.

And, as we discussed, you'll have to modify this position for MMA because your opponent doesn't need your neck or arms, he can win by dropping bombs on your face.

Basically you need to survive first, clear your head, and then as soon as you get posture – *boom* – you've got to move and get the heck out of there before you take any more damage.



POSTURE IN TURTLE

There are a number of ways that you can end up turtled: maybe you tried a takedown but your opponent sprawled, maybe you were pinned and came out to your knees, or maybe you just ended up there in a scramble.

People coming from other grappling arts often have a hard time adjusting to the BJJ and submission grappling approach to using the turtle. In Greco-Roman wrestling and judo, people often try to stay face down to avoid giving points to their opponent.



A common Greco-Roman wrestling position.

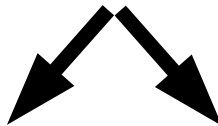
In freestyle wrestling, competitors will often use the referee's position because you can't attack the neck. But these are all mistakes in Brazilian jiu-jitsu or submission grappling.



The referee's position in freestyle wrestling.



Here's probably the worst posture you can be in on all fours: head up, arms straight, and lots of space under my body. From here, Jason can get a choke or armlock, roll me over, take my back... whatever he wants.



One of my biggest problems with Judo (which is an art that I love) is that in Judo, the rear mount is not considered a pinning position.

If they were to make that one simple rule change and make rear mount a pinning position, I think it would improve Judo groundwork. I'm probably going to get a lot of hate mail for saying that, but that's what I believe.

This is Lesson 15 from the Online Grappling Concepts Course: www.grapplearts.tv



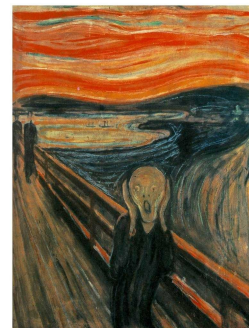
So what's good turtle posture? Chin down and shoulders shrugged to protect your neck. Knees and elbows tight to your body to prevent him from getting his hooks in or getting a knee under your body.



The turtle tucked into his shell

I mainly use one of three hand positions to defend my neck:

First, there's keeping your hands up on either side of face. I call this the "home alone" posture (or "The Scream" posture as per Edvard Munch's famous painting).



'Home Alone' hand positioning aka 'The Scream'



The second posture, which is mostly used with the gi, is the 'Judo Cross.' Here my thumbs are inside my own lapels to block chokes. This is highly defensive, but it works.



The Judo Cross

Next is the 'Shield,' where I put one hand across to block my face and then further block the space between my bicep and forearm with my other hand.



The Shield position.



Using the Shield hand position when you're in turtle completely blocks one side, but leaves the other side somewhat open. Therefore you always have to be ready to pull your elbow back to block his hook if he tries to get it in.



Protecting the space between the left elbow and left hip



Another strategy from the shielding position is to bait your opponent to reach over and grip under your arm.



Then you trap his arm and roll underneath him, ending up on top.





REAR MOUNT

Now we've gone from bad to worst: trapped in rear mount!

What are your opponent's objectives?

- First he wants to maintain position.
- Next, he wants to choke you.
- He can also armbar you if you screw up badly enough.
- And if you turn face down, he can flatten you out, make you suffer, and in MMA (or self defense) he can strike you.



Choked and armbarred: two bad rear mount outcomes!

My worst possible posture from here would be face down, chin up, and arms out. That position means tons of attacks for him and no defense for me.



Both in MMA and regular grappling, DON'T turn face down.

This is Lesson 15 from the Online Grappling Concepts Course: www.grapplearts.tv



Let's take away his offensive options as best as we can.

Start by fighting like mad to turn and face the ceiling. Now, without gravity on his side, he can't strike you as effectively. Furthermore if you now manage to turn and face him you'll end up in his guard (if you turned and faced him when you were belly down, then he would've gotten the mount instead).



When you get face-up to the ceiling, what do you do with your hands? Some of the hand positions are the same as for the turtle position.



The arm positions I use most often here are the "home alone"...



...the "judo cross"...

...or "the parka" where I or one where I put my arm over my head, cover my far ear and also block with my other hand. (Your hands and arms here are like the fringe of fur on a parka hood.)





The advantage of the third position (the parka) is that if he reaches around with either hand, I can then trap his arm under one of my armpits and hopefully also control his wrist. Now I've taken one arm and put it into a position where he can't choke me with.



Once I've trapped an arm I still want to escape...

Generally I drive towards the underhook side, first trying to get my head on the ground...



Then I drive a bit more to get my shoulders on the ground....



...and then I work to get my hips free. At some point it'll turn into a race: I'm trying to get him to half guard and he's trying to get mount. Hopefully I win!





One of the most important things to remember when you're trapped in rear mount is: chin down, shoulders up.

There is no "magic bullet" here, just a combination of awareness, determination, and neck strength. Add to that a strong shrug and high pain tolerance, and it can make sinking a choke very hard.



Chin down, shoulders up.

I don't like dental work or bleeding lips, so I DON'T rely solely on chin down, shoulders up. But shrugging in this way has saved my butt many times. Even if your hands are completely out of posture, then sometimes this shrug can buy you enough time to get your hands back in place.

I'm sure you've noticed the common theme of "hands up" for rear mount posture. This is important, because if I bring a hand down, there's always the danger that he'll trap my arm with his foot, leaving me with only one hand to defend the choke.





POSTURE SUMMARY

Keep in mind that posture can be a fuzzy concept. There's just no 'be all and end all' way of doing things.

Back when we did posture in closed guard, I talked about how some people pass guard by giving you the triangle choke. They just have the neck strength and the sensitivity that even if the triangle choke is fully on, they can still pass. I'm not one of those people, but maybe you are. Or maybe the guy you're wrestling is.

Another classic example is the 'São Paulo' guard pass. Generally when you're passing guard, you don't want to put your hand on the ground and give your opponent the overhook.

But some people's favorite guard pass involves putting their hand on the ground and letting their opponent take the overhook. In theory they're breaking the rules, but they know how to make it work for them.



**The São Paulo pass in progress.
(white has the overhook).**



Or if you want another example, take escaping from side mount. I can give him a crappy posture and bait him to go for mount. When he does I trap his leg in half guard. An escape based on 'bad' posture!



It's also important to understand that good posture doesn't make you invulnerable: a skilled opponent might still be able to submit you or improve his position. So keep in mind that you ALSO have to know how to get to posture and what to do from that posture.

If you don't work to escape once you have posture, then your opponent will eventually figure out a way around it.



Another theme that was fairly consistent over these last few lessons was keeping your arms “inside the box”.



Arms OUT of the box



Arms IN the box

You can't generally do much when your arms are outside the box. They're vulnerable to attacks.

And, generally, if you're pushing with your arms straight in front of you, then you should be pushing on your opponent's hips or you're probably opening yourself up to lots of counters and submissions. So if your arms are straight, then the closer they are to the hips, the safer they are.



Side escape pushing the hips (good) vs the chest (bad)

And with all this emphasis on the arms, don't forget about your legs in posture: they're important too.

This is Lesson 15 from the Online Grappling Concepts Course: www.grapplearts.tv



Also, posture is dynamic. In a scramble you might go through 5 or 6 different positions very quickly – and for all of them you have to make the correct postural decision.

If you're always getting caught by the same submission – say it's always the same sweep, or the same submission - then it's probably not a question of learning a specific defense. Probably you should be looking for more of a preventative, pro-active, postural solution to solve your problems!

Isolate and experiment with specific positions. Ask your instructor. Ask your training partners questions like these:

- *"Why are you always getting that armbar? Are my arms in the wrong position?"*
- *"Where should I put my hands when you're pinning me like that? Where should I put my legs?"*

Try to figure out where you're going wrong. For example, if you've gotten choked 3 or 4 times in a row from rear mount, ask your training partner what's going on. (*"Why are you choking me so easily?"*)

If he tells you that you're lifting your chin every time he grabs your wrist, then your problem is 90% solved, isn't it? You now know what you need to focus on next, namely keeping your darn chin down no matter what else is going on!



Lesson 16 Preview: Submissions made Simple, part 1 of 2

Next week, we're going to do something completely different. I'm going to do my best to cover every joint lock that exists in BJJ, submission grappling, Judo, Sambo, Indonesian Silat, etc.

If that sounds like a tall order then it might also surprise you to know that I'm talking about a lot fewer jointlocks than you might think.

Despite there being hundreds and hundreds of different finishing techniques, there are actually surprisingly few options to twist someone's arm in order to make them say 'uncle.'

So, see you again next week.

Stephan Kesting
www.grapplearts.tv