



26. Preparing for Competition

This article excerpted from: **Introduction to Olympic Style Sparring video** By Sang H. Kim Special thanks to [Turtle Press](#) for the use of this article.

One of the most common questions I hear from students is "How can I prepare for competition?" The best way to get ready for competition is to follow a plan designed by your instructor or coach. If you are a top level competitor, everything will be scientifically planned for you and all you have to do is show up and train. However, if you are one of the thousands of recreational competitors around the world, you are responsible for designing some or all of your competition training plan.

The first thing you have to do is assess what level of competition you are preparing for and how much time you have available. Ideally, for a local tournament, a few months are enough to get in competition form. By spending about two months on general practice and one month on specific competition skills and strategies, you can refine your skills to the level necessary to succeed in a small tournament. For a national or international competition, however, planning should begin at least one year ahead of time. Once you have determined the level of competition and amount of time available for your training, you can create an individual plan.

For a national or international level competition, the first type of training you have to undertake is fundamental physical training. This consists of general fitness activities like calisthenics, running and weight training. At the beginning of your competition regimen, your daily training should consist of 70% fundamental physical training and 30% basic martial arts skill practice. Ideally, this plan should be followed for 4 to 8 weeks to develop the proper physical condition for competition.

The next stage of preparation focuses on sport-specific training - conditioning the particular muscles that will be used in competition. For martial arts this means interval training (for instance, explosive interval sparring, target drills, speed heavy bag workouts), stretching, footwork and sport-specific weight training. During this period, 50% of the training time should be devoted to conditioning and 50% to skill development.

After four to eight weeks of sport-specific conditioning, the focus should shift to technical practice. Technical practice includes free sparring, target drills, and heavy bag workouts to hone reflexes and speed and perfect individual skills. In this phase of training, 30% of the training time should be devoted to maintaining conditioning and 70% to developing and perfecting skills to be used in competition. This stage should last at least as long as the previous two stages. If extra time is available in the training plan, it should be used to extend the technical practice stage.

The final phase of preparation for competition consists of establishing mental fitness and strategy. By this time, in the weeks leading up to the competition, the competitor should have established a solid foundation of skills. In the final weeks, a game plan must be established and the competitor should do his or her best to stay focused and healthy. At least one week before competition, all hard contact training should be discontinued and the competitor should begin to conserve energy for the competition day.

On the day of the competition, be sure to arrive with plenty of time to register, weigh-in and warm-up. If you will be competing late in the day, bring water or juice and snacks to keep your energy level high. After you have passed through the weigh-in or registration process, go over your plan and review your most important techniques. Spend some time to familiarize yourself with the competition site and get used to the temperature, lighting, and layout.

If you know when you will compete, plan to start warming up about thirty minutes before the start of your match. If you do not know when you will compete, as is often the case in smaller competitions, try to stay loose and focused but do not overexert yourself early in the day. If you win your first match, you will most likely have to compete again soon. Take a few minutes to relax and cool down after your first match, then ask your coach for feedback. Focus on what you did well and what you need to improve for your next outing. Attend to any injuries you might have gotten with ice or tape. About fifteen to twenty minutes before your next match, begin to physically and mentally prepare yourself. Follow this pattern until you have completed your competition for the day.

Although each competitor eventually develops an ideal individual training plan for competition, this outline can help you get started on your own training regimen. Always keep in mind your goals for training and strive for consistent, measurable improvement on your road to competition.