



**Thousand Waves**  
Martial Arts & Self-Defense Center, NFP

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### **What to look for in a Martial Arts School**

If you are considering training in the martial arts, or if you are moving away from your current school, you may benefit from some guidance on what to look for in a martial arts school. Here is an overview to help you find a good match.

**Know what you want.** Some schools are tournament-oriented and geared for those who want to compete; some focus on teaching physical self-defense strategies; some—like Thousand Waves—view the practice as a health practice and an art form. Understand that there are many approaches, and consider what your goals are.

**Welcoming spirit.** When you call or stop by, do you feel welcomed into the school? Look for a place that has a positive, welcoming environment and reaches out to new members.

**There should be no secrets.** You should be able to find out easily what the fees are. There should be an opportunity for you to at least watch a beginner class—or even better, to take one—before you make a decision about training there.

**Avoid contracts.** Avoid long-term (annual, multi-month) contracts.

**Look for evidence that the space is well cared for.** A school need not be fancy to be a good school. But look for a clean and lovingly cared for space.

**Talk to teachers.** Ask to talk with teachers, and ask them any questions you are wondering, such as the focus of the school, the art(s) taught and lineage, rank of teachers, teaching approach, demographics of the students, how rank tests are conducted, etc.

**Learn about etiquette.** Rituals and etiquette will vary among schools. Ask about any rituals you are asked to use, so you understand their meaning. Stay open to etiquette that is new to you, but if something feels uncomfortable, talk with a teacher.

**Empty your teacup.** If you have had prior training, it is polite and appropriate to inform the teachers of your past experience. But also recognize that you may be a beginner in a new style, and be willing to ‘empty your teacup’ in order to learn a new art in a different manner. Appreciate your experience, and also explore what the new school offers.

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