

THE IMPORTANCE OF KNOWING WHEN TO TEACH CERTAIN CRITICAL TECHNIQUES.



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NOTE: This document was originally NOT to be freely distributed, only given to those who teach for me. Plus, I am writing hard and fast rules, when really, it isn't hard and fast at all, but all relative to the techniques under discussion, as well as the student and teacher. However, at the time I was living in China, I couldn't be there to do it myself, so I had to write articles like this in order to keep up standards when I was far away from my school. I also wrote this document in a bit of haste when I saw a need, and yet may have to revise it when I find out how people are interpreting it, or how badly I have written or described certain things in it, or find I have left out something important in my hurry. Other articles will have to be added on more specific issues, which unfortunately are often on a case by case basis, but general rules can be generally followed most of the time. This article is a work in progress.

None of this is on HOW to teach it. That is different, and actually, somewhat easier, although in all the critical techniques (well, all techniques for that matter) there are important issues to watch for and important issues to teaching them. That will have to be resolved later in other articles, and unfortunately, this is also often on a case by case basis anyway, although, again, there are general rules that can be followed most of the time. This is true for all of VTK.

There is a difference between LEARNING something, PRACTICING something and TRAINING something. Each has a different strategy for best development. Learning should be done slowly and precisely. Practicing should be done under various conditions of speed and power, but ensuring correct techniques and application. If you make a mistake, go back to learning, get it right, then return to practice. Training is as close to fighting as you can make it, until you make a mistake, then you go back to learning, then practice, then back to training again. This is be the subject of another article – the one on Deep Training has much of this, also on this website.

General Solution.

The main, and obvious, solution is to immediately stop all training at and past the point where they have bad practises. Start from all the techniques that are the foundation of whatever they learned incorrectly, and go over each and every one step by step, getting each one right, then training it until the habit replaces the old incorrect one before going onto the next one. Keep doing this until you catch up to where they should be practicing correctly up to where they are supposed to be. Be meticulous until it is absolutely correct, every time, and the bad habit is not continued. This can be a real problem, but it is the only solution. HOW you fix it and make sure it doesn't come back, well, that depends on what is actually wrong.

Onwards:

Critical Techniques.

Critical techniques are those that, if taught/learned either at the wrong time or in the wrong way, a teacher MAY damage the student's ability to progress in VTK or his ability to fight. You can be lucky, and have nothing go wrong, but do you want to take that chance? Not if you want to be a good teacher, and not if you want to teach in the Barry Lee system, or correctly teach the WSL method. (Actually, it isn't the learning that is the problem but the practicing of it. If the student does nothing, it does no harm.)

It is due to this general principle that I do not accept students who have learned the dummy or further in other systems of VTK. It is far too much hard work to go back to fix it, and most students will not do it anyway, so it is a waste of both of our efforts. I call this the lesson of the singing pig. If you try to teach a pig to sing, then all it does is frustrate you and annoy the pig.

I have somewhat subjectively given a score listing below to give people the idea of relative importance of certain techniques. They apply equally to people who learned badly, or learned under a different system of Wing Chun/VTK/Wing Tsun/Yong Chun/Weng Chun etc. The highest scores are those that generally do the most damage, easiest to stuff up and hardest to fix, the lowest, the least damage, harder to stuff up and generally easiest to fix.

Rated from 10 as the highest, 1 as the lowest, where 10 is bad. Category A is damage to training/fighting, category B is how easy it is to stuff up and category C is how hard to fix. Naturally this will vary according to many reasons from teacher's ability, student's ability, difference from what it should be, how long bad habits have been practiced, and how well the student diligently tries to fix it.

The first remedy is to cease and desist the bad practice, completely stop the part you are doing (dummy, wall bag, knives, whatever) and often the student needs to stop all things more advanced than the techniques under discussion, and go back to basics for at the very least that section of the system (perhaps all the way back to first principles), rebuild good habits in their entirety from the beginning to the end, before going back to whatever you were doing and try to start that section anew with

the new and hopefully correct habits. This takes LOTS of time, more than the first time you learned it, maybe up to 5 times as much to break bad habits (slower). A better approach, if possible, is build new ones (better easier and faster) to replace the bad habits, but sometimes this is not feasible.

Worst issues: ratings 30-25.

Fixing these issues can be really difficult, often involves blood and pain, and the teacher has to work very hard, and the student usually loses heart before they are fixed. The teacher must care a lot to try. The reason why they involve blood and pain is that reflexes aren't really countered by anything other than something painful to teach the hindbrain to do something different. It requires operant conditioning. One easier and preferable way to try to fix this is, instead of forcing the old reflex to be rewired, teach a completely new one to supersede it, making sure the old one isn't used. This is difficult, but at least is a lot better than the instructor having to instantly punch someone in the mouth each time they reflexively do something wrong. Unfortunately, the "Building New Habits" method it is not always possible, and doesn't always work. If it doesn't, it's back to the blood and pain method.

Teach these techniques at the wrong time, and you may possibly forever damage a student's ability. In reality, these things often cannot be fixed since few students and teachers are willing to do what is necessary. Instead they will be satisfied with it as it is. The teacher has to have to care a lot to do this much work. It would have been better to have learned it at the right time and correctly in the first place.

Personally speaking, if people are doing these wrong and are not already my students, it is mostly not worth me teaching them. I usually simply refuse, and just offer some advice that I realize the student will probably not follow. But it isn't my problem.

Examples:

This is as a complete list as I can think of at the moment. Other things no doubt will be added.

- Knives. (Baat Cham Dao) A 10, B10, C10. So many things can go wrong. Just don't. Stop right now. Punches become weak, stance out of place, hands will loft rather than hit straight, etc. etc. Avoid like the plague. Hands must be damn near perfect, and almost impossible to take off-line from their attacks

and defences before you even consider trying to learn. Stance must be very strong. All previous training must have been done, and done to perfection. There are ways around these issues, but you must train them at the same time, and they mostly come from weaponry practice outside of VTK. At the very least, double the wall bag punches every day and punch it very hard, but this will only help if you know how to punch the bag correctly, and punch it very very hard.

- First defence – bong vs jut sau. A9 B 9, C10. This is probably the most important reflex in VTK. Stuff with this, and you stuff up the ability to respond in an emergency. I suggest being extremely careful with this. Eventually, it should be done so fast the person performing it doesn't even know they are doing it, nor should they know the attack is coming. They should also be able to do it blindfolded without hindrance. It is a reflex. It should be trained in isolation until it is pretty much a reflex. It should not be undermined until it is firmly in place as a reflex, by doing other techniques such as striking under the bong, since this will hinder the learning of the reflex. Just do this one single thing, not free chi sau, until it is good. How to teach this will be the subject of another later article, which I have not yet written.
- VTK Wallbag. A10 B10 C8. The problem with this is mainly to do with stance and telegraphing, and while not as hard to fix as some things, until it is fixed it has a serious detriment to stability during fighting and chi sau, and the "tow-ball" effect of the punch cannot be developed until it is fixed. One good way to fix the stance problem in particular is lots of seriously hard double dan chi, making sure the student doesn't move the body. Like a statue. No rocking or moving the body etc. Similarly, once they can do that, they can go back to the bag and do the same making sure the body and the elbow of the punch do not move.
- Free Chi Sau A 9 B9 C9. Too easy to build bad habits unless carefully built up. Since you actually reward yourself for bad practices, your body really doesn't want to give up things that seem to work in Chi Sau, but will get you hurt in a fight. Although Chi Sau is supposed to build fighting reflexes, not everything that is successful in it will help in a fight, and some things will actually hinder you. This means that the things that hinder should be culled

and the things that help should be cultivated. If the teacher and student don't fully understand what they are doing, then mistakes will be made, and bad reflexes instilled. Examples and overhand and chopping actions, unnecessary pivoting and movement, backfists, flicky techniques, going off centre to get in bullshit 'winning' hits and using the other person's recovery to centreline to pull your techniques back to centre. None of these will work in a fight. Remember that chi sau is not about winning but about improving your chances in a fight. It's training. You can't win against your partner in chi sau, since it is not a competition but a cooperative training method, any more than you can win against the dummy, the wall bag or even in Siu Lim Tao. Fixing this takes forever, since each incorrect reflex must be dealt with separately. Better to stop the student completely from chi sau, and start again from dan chi or wherever their program deviated from ideal. Maybe Siu Lim Tao. If they are from another system other than WSLVTK, stopping chi sau and starting the Seung Ma/Tui Ma training from the beginning is the best way to do this, since invariably they didn't learn it or at least not correctly. How to teach this will be the subject of a later article.

Solution:

None, really, that is practicable for the student, and not worth fixing for the teacher. Pain, hard work, retraining. Blood sweat and tears. Start again. Chi Sau can be fixed with long term effort, and may be useful to do so if the student hasn't learned the dummy. Long term fixing and training.

Moderately serious issues ratings 20-25

These are just a pain in the ass to fix, involving time and effort best spent elsewhere. Getting it right the first time is far better.

Examples:

- Pivoting. Aka shifting, turning. A8 B8 C8. The main problem here is moving too much, moving without needing to, moving around instead of forwards or in other ways incorrectly such as changing sides, not timing the pivot correctly with the waist and hands and feet as a unit, and losing facing. All either open you up or make you slower or both. This is not so hard for the teacher to fix, but takes a LONG time for the student to learn and practice, much longer than the original learning process for most people. Have to first go back to no pivoting especially in chi sau, and just practice pivoting all by itself separately until it is moving as a unit, and then (can be over a period of several months to a year if they are only training 3 times a week or so) put it back together into chi sau correctly. Tedious and slow process. In pivoting training, like Seung Ma/Tui Ma, if the training is interrupted by a long period (one month or more) of no training, often the student has to start from the beginning since a lot of progress is usually lost. How to teach this will be the subject of a later article.
- Stepping backwards. (aka Tui Ma, angle stepping, backwards chi sau stepping, etc) A 8 B 7 C 8. The main difficulty is that once advanced past this, the student rarely will go back and train it properly if done improperly. Truthfully, forwards stepping is more important for fighting – unless something goes wrong. And that is what WSL emphasized. Things go wrong in fighting. How to teach this will be the subject of a later article.
- Stepping forwards, (aka Seung Ma, Forwards angle stepping, chi sau stepping etc.) A 9 B 6 C 7. Much more critical for fighting, but on the other hand similarly easier to teach, and harder to get wrong. How to teach this will be the subject of a later article.
- First (jut sau) attack, second (lap sau) defence, second attack (lap sau) and any other basic chi sau techniques. A8 B7 C7. Can be a pain to fix, but mostly

it's a matter of repetition, unlike the first defence. To fix it simply stop doing chi sau, isolate the jut sau drills from chi sau and make them do them as drills and not chi sau, until they do them correctly - slowly at first then building to full speed over a period of weeks or months, then start using them in chi sau again. Go over the same sequence as if they were learning the first time, but correctly, and go over it step by step.

- Dummy. A7 B8 C7. Biggest problem here is that people don't want to learn it again, since they think they are advanced. I don't usually accept people who have learned the dummy from another system for this reason. One of the main functions of dummy training is to coordinate the whole body, and to shape your own techniques against an indestructible immovable opponent who does another martial art and isn't standing directly in front of you. It can be considered the complement of chi sau as well. Usually people have focussed on the hands, when they should be focussing on their waist and feet more. Training goes through several phases. The first is to learn the moves, getting shapes, directions of movements, techniques etc. correct. Then comes a long period of adjustment where the student has to play with various positions until the movements are as correct as possible. Then a period where the body is coordinated, timing so the hits are exactly together. This period makes the dummy look a little stilted and the moves are 'popped' into place. This is quite a long period, and often the point where most people who didn't train full time get up to when taught by WSL in their holiday trips or seminars. The next phase is where you do this timing with the smooth whole body movement, and this also takes quite a while of adjustment. The last two phases are largely encouraged rather than taught, and usually when the whole form is damn near perfect. The first involves experimenting with variations, and the last is freeform. Fixing bad techniques simply involves enormous amounts of time and repetition from the student and a lot of nagging from the teacher.

Generally, I don't accept a student who has learned up to or through the dummy in another system, since they usually won't start again from the beginning to fix it. Many will say so, but they do not empty their cup sufficiently, nor will they make the necessary effort.

The dummy will be the subject of later articles, but it will be quite some time before I do them.

Solution:

Sweat and tears, and maybe blood. Lots of swearing. Critical observation. Pivoting nearly not worth it, but can be fixed with long term diligence.

Suck to fix, but doable. Ratings 15-20.

The student has to relearn to fix, and then practice, just like the first time, only better and more so. The main issue is that it just takes up extra time and effort that the student would have been better off spending elsewhere, if they simply learned it correctly and at the right time in the first place. Some students need to break bad or wrong habits, which takes longer than building it correctly the first time. Most of VTK is here, or in the easy to fix category.

Examples include:

- The VTK punch A 7 B 7 C 6 How to teach this will be the subject of a later article.
- Kicks etc. These vary a lot from kick to kick and person to person, but average about A 6 B 6 C 6 (the number of the beast) How to teach this will be the subject of a later article.
- Siu Lim Tao. A 5 B 8 C 5. I have written lots about this, to be put on the web at a later date.
- Pole, bui jee, chum kiu, All the other forms all about the same, rating about A 5 B 8 C 5. The pole has a few things that can damage training but since most people don't train it diligently anyway, I have yet to see it manifest in a student yet.

Solution:

Serious amounts of training and diligence. Sweat. Critical observation.

10-15 Pain in the ass.

This is all the ordinary stuff that was particularly hard for the student to learn the first time and is going to be harder to relearn than it was to learn the first time. Mostly, these are the ordinary techniques, drills and exercises and such things the student had trouble with personally, or the previous teacher didn't understand sufficiently, so what they are is more or less dependent on the student's previous training.

Examples:

You know what they are.

Solution:

Sweat. Diligence. Critical observation.

Less than 10 easy to fix.

Just relearn. Same kind of time originally spent, occasionally less due to prior learning. Nothing to worry about. Plenty in this category, but some examples to give the idea.

Examples are:

- Stepping drills, like moving up and down the hall. Just work.
- Drills. Mostly very easy to fix.

Anything else can be variously assigned lower or higher level criticality based on the student's and teacher's experience and ability. For many things it doesn't matter in which order you teach them, and often, certain things can fix problems that have arisen in other exercises, but the above items give an indication of the relative levels of critical nature inherent to certain of the techniques.

Solution:

Diligence. Critical observation.

How critical is it?

To give an idea of how critical this is, Barry was reluctant to allow us to decide for ourselves when (and how) to teach the wall bag to students even when we were learning the dummy ourselves. He really didn't enjoy us teaching the first defence without consulting him under any circumstances, and as for free chi sau, well, he was more likely to let us teach chum kiu than teach it. I am not sure he fully approves to this day, although he sees that it is necessary. These things are just too important to be left to teachers without the right knowledge and experience.

Barry certainly didn't really like anyone to teach the first defence without his permission until he gave the senior guys the right to do so, when he returned after a couple of years in Germany, announced that he gave the seniors their schools, and gave us all permission to do so. Before that he preferred us to consult with him, and for example I wasn't teaching the first defence until I was well into the dummy. I had finished chum kiu before he let me teach the first defence at all. And then, only to students he could monitor. A couple of years later he let me do it, since I hadn't made any serious errors.

I had had his tacit approval before this, but he preferred to at least be consulted, which I of course did before and after teaching it and even to this day if he was easily available. Of his students, as far as I know only Fu, Gino, Theo and I had this permission after this date, no one else. Of my own Australian students, only Craig, Mikelis and Benny have permission from Barry to teach this on their own, and they consult each other in regards to it anyway.

It isn't that it is hard to teach the basic technique: I feel (along with the other seniors, Barry, and in fact it is regarded as a general policy for most VTK systems) that you should be able to teach something that is about two sections of the system behind you. The problem is that it is WHEN to teach something that is the issue. The sequence of events leading up to WHEN to teach this technique is very, very important. Barry thought it was so important that I was half way through the dummy and allowed to teach people Chum Kiu before I was encouraged to teach the first defence and free chi sau, even though these are normally taught years before chum kiu.

It is also important to know when it is good enough to move onto the next technique.

I still feel this is the best way to go, but certain things have made this impractical, so I felt the need to write this document in an attempt to teach something that really needs a physical presence.

Barry, myself and the other seniors are unavailable to do this due to distance. Since it has become impractical to do it the way I would like (hands on), instead I will attempt to remedy the lack of knowledge by instruction. I would definitely advise that the senior guys of each school consult with each other on the critical points where the technique is on the list above, but especially the first defence and free chi sau, or you could possibly stuff up the students training and be unable to fix it.

I hope that much is clear now.

I will now give a quick rundown of things to watch for before teaching some of the above techniques. Making sure you understand the explanations of what I am looking for is also very important, and try consulting other seniors, because I cannot show you from here. I used to consult my seniors on how the students were going especially at the critical levels, so I can't see why others find it difficult to do so. In each case, the student must have completed previous drills, exercises and form components to a sufficient level of expertise.

The standard method for knowing if someone can go to the next level is that a person must be able to do 30 of the previous technique without stopping and without serious mistakes. A mistake or a stop means start the 30 again. They should in fact be doing 30 without stopping EVERY class of all the main techniques.

When to teach Dan Chi:

- Must know the whole of Siu Lim Tao adequately and be able to do it by themselves, without prompting, to a sufficient standard.
- Stance must be adequate, from foot to head. Must be able to do at least a 7 or 10 minute form by themselves, without breaks, without breaking stance, or waist, stretching, relaxing their arms, looking around, etc.
- They must be square when they do the form.
- Tan sau must be close enough to centre, at least with the elbow sufficiently behind the tan.
- Bong must have the right shape.
- Punch must be adequate.
- Bottom or bong sau side taught first.
- Top of dan chi must be taught after bottom is adequately formed and the stance stops wobbling, distorting, twisting and so on. This will be about a month of regular training (2-3 times a week, every week) at least, probably more like two months, or about 2-3 weeks if they train every day. They must be able to do 30 of the bottom with each hand without stopping and without serious errors.
- How to teach this will be the subject of a later article.

When to teach Double Dan Chi:

- Must be able to remain fairly stable
- Both top and bottom Dan Chi must be performed to a suitable standard.
- Suitable standard in this case means able to do at least 30 of each top and bottom without stopping and without serious errors. Most important that they do not have to stop, the muscular development and endurance is also important.
- Don't teach double until they have nice firm structure in hand and body and stance, nice and square and getting stable. Shape of hand movements must be good, and they should begin to have the flow and power, especially the punch.
- How to teach this will be the subject of a [later article](#).

When to teach the Wallbag:

- Student must have good punch and stance and elbow position, and must have stopped wobbling under strong Double Dan Chi.
- The important point is that the student must be continually watched and guided for the rest of their training, not just the first few months, although this early period is critical. Bad habits in punching can stuff up everything, but most importantly, stance and knockdown power.
- No one is to do more than 50 per day without direct and explicit permission from me or Barry.
- IF the student's stance wobbles when punching as hard as they can, they need to stop and do more double dan chi and rolling until they stop, before going back to bag training.
- The elbow must be watched to ensure it doesn't pop out under impact, but instead stays behind the hand during the punch.
- Ensure that the punch is taught correctly (I'll write an article on this for next month, focussing on how to teach it. If you have Barry's article on the wallbag that would be great. I am sorry, but Barry told me to not give it out without his permission. But I can rewrite it with more details, at a later date.)
- How to teach this will be the subject of a **later article**.

When to teach Rolling:

- Student must have stopped wobbling under the pressure of double dan chi.
- Don't teach stepping until they are ready, see below.
- How to teach this will be the subject of a **later article**.

When to teach Stepping back:

- Student can hold the position of rolling for 50 a side without stopping
- Positions must be tight and correct
- Pressure/force must be correct, and forward.
- Shapes are right
- Rolling is good enough to forget about the hands for the next six months
- Shapes must be just about instinctive
- The important point is that now, they are going to be concentrating on the feet, so the hands must be good enough right now, not later.
- Don't teach stepping forward until they are doing going backwards instinctively.
- How to teach this will be the subject of a [later article](#).

When to teach Stepping forward:

- Student knows instinctively where his feet go for pretty much all speeds of going back, since once stepping forwards the student will be (correctly) reluctant to going backwards for the rest of his training.
- The important point is not that they need to learn forwards, but that they will not step back as much once they learn it, so they need to learn going backwards very well RIGHT NOW, before stepping forwards, not later or they will not learn it correctly. If they haven't got it correct, they should stop all other more advanced training and focus on backwards stepping until it is correct.
- How to teach this will be the subject of a **later article**.

The next three sections it is hard to describe when to teach it but I will try. One point is the student must almost be doing it by reflex before you teach it. NOT TRYING TO DO IT, but reacting by itself. Trying to do it shows they aren't ready. Sometimes the student has made a deliberate attempt to stop doing it, which is also good. Movement should be conservative, ie, only move when you have to. Pivoting or jumping or stepping or any other unnecessary movement when you don't need to is a waste of precious time and a potential risk in a fight.

When to teach Pivoting:

- PIVOTING IS TAUGHT AFTER CHI SAU IS GOING WELL.
- You can see that their other techniques, especially with stepping, are already going well in free chi sau.
- You can see they need to learn it by virtue of doing everything else well, but they can't block or trap someone facing or refacing.
- You will notice that they are beginning to use small steps as pivots, or you may notice that they aren't and the lack is obvious, although their techniques are adequate.
- Don't teach chum kiu until the pivoting is really good. Waist must be adequate before this. They must also be using pivoting in chi sau quite well.
- How to teach this will be the subject of a **later article**.

When to teach the first defence:

- TAUGHT IMMEDIATELY AFTER STEPPING, the first in a series of 'traps' and 'defences' which must all be accomplished to a sufficient standard prior to starting chi sau. (30 times each hand without stopping, without serious error, and by reflexively coming up BEFORE they even learn the attack or anything else.)
- Footwork is impeccable and instinctive under pressure and correct nearly all the time.
- Footwork training (consult the lists of techniques given earlier) must be complete.
- Stance is damn near perfect when stationary, and preferably even when moving fast. Distance between feet constantly correct no matter how fast they step forwards or backwards.
- Shape of bong is very good
- The rest of their stuff is good enough so it can be forgotten for a long time
- The bong is coming up by itself almost correctly on the odd occasion when someone inadvertently (or the instructor tests the student) does the first attack during stepping, pretty much staying correctly in position and stance.
 - After this, they must learn to stop throwing it briefly to learn the defence, so they should not be challenged with it during stepping practice. It will slow down progress.
 - Use them for people learning the first attack for a while (prior to learning the defence) so they can just relax a bit and get familiar with it. Let them go with the attack. Not flail around trying to defend against it yet.
 - After a few days of this, when things are all ok, and they are not flailing or struggling, and holding stance and position (except they are getting their hands trapped) then teach them the defence, but be very sure they are actually OK over a series of observations, and consult those training with them on this matter.
- Do not teach the attack until they can perform the defence under pressure and faster than they can think, including stepping with it.

- Keep a careful eye to make sure that they aren't moving all over the place or that they don't turn away, and that they stay square, etc. NO PIVOTTING.
- This will be the subject of a **later article**.

When to teach Free Chi Sau:

- This is really hard to say exactly when to start. People will lead into this virtually on their own, but don't encourage it until it starts to look good with the various combinations of traps, defences and stepping. (in order – first defence, first trap, lap defence, lap sau, jut/defence/lap sau, pak attack. Each is first taught as a drill, then by itself, then stationary with poon sau, then stepping, all up to a suitable standard before going onto the next one. Suitable standard means 30 of each done well, without pause, and that the defences are reflexive, not planned or thought about.
- Begin leading into it with various combinations of the main traps and defences, and slowly get them into learning the chi sau process. Ensure it's light at first, and careful so they don't get bad habits.
- I would highly recommend that this be discussed with ALL the other seniors, and be very reluctant to encourage this too early. This is a very critical situation, and hard to determine.
- Experiment with it with the student little by little, leading them into it when you see they are doing it by instinct. People trying to do it, or any of the critical techniques, should be discouraged. It is hard to say when people are doing it by themselves or trying to do it, but this is an important part of the decision, as is true for most of the critical techniques.
- How to teach this will be the subject of a later article.
- How to get people to continue after a couple of attacks will also have to be the subject of **a later article**.

Conclusion

OK, I hope this helps. I would prefer reluctance and being conservative about teaching these things, teaching later rather than earlier, especially those techniques higher than about 25. I would like people to discuss this with me as well, both what to do when things go wrong, (so many things can go wrong) and also, if people have been teaching too early, what is going wrong (maybe nothing, but maybe something critical, too). There are also step by step breakdowns of how to teach this, and other issues such as what can go wrong, and how to fix it, but unfortunately I do not have the time to write them up this time. The various people teaching can discuss it with me, and maybe I can put together something like this each month or so, developing it into a manual or something.