



# 101 Ways to Teach Across Cultures

## Skills That Will Open Doors to Effective Self-Defense Education

The National Women's Martial Arts Federation is committed to making self-defense training accessible across diverse communities. This list of suggestions is to help all self-defense instructors improve their teaching and communication skills. This list also is one point along a living process. The NWMAF Annual Conference has panels and sessions each year to grow your abilities as an instructor.

1. Listen
2. Be quiet
3. Be sensitive; notice the nuances of communities that are different than yours
4. Don't force stuff
5. Create a safe space
6. Discourage types of actions that are hurtful; gently nudge classes in the right direction
7. Acknowledge people's cultural differences without tripping too much
8. "Sit in other people's houses"
9. Realize what you don't know
10. Leave your own arrogance, sense of entitlement, and even rank at the door
11. Approach taboo subjects; be honest but sensitive
12. Adjust your lessons to be relevant to the community that you are in
13. Remember that language is important
14. Consider training good instructors from within a community and sending them back to that community
15. Look at the schools that are achieving true cultural diversity and relevance and see what they are doing well
16. Don't pack your lesson plans; build space for questioning into your lesson plan
17. Elicit what you need to learn about your class from your class
18. Read people/be intuitive to how they are reacting to what you're teaching
19. Deal with your own community's issues
20. Understand the "whiteness model" too

*-Lauren Wheeler*



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21. Translate your skills and tenets into their reality
22. Realize that many young ladies today are 3rd-generation feminists and that you may be a 1st- or 2nd-generation feminist
23. Give credit to survival skills we don't usually see as survival skills (e.g., humor, silence, etc.)
24. Realize that, for women of color, being the only one of her race/ethnicity in a place is often uncomfortable, threatening, or plain old unappealing
25. Realize that a woman will often choose her culture or community over feminist ideals
26. Realize the intricacies, misunderstandings, or long-time conflicts between various communities of color (like Black American vs. Black African, Chinese vs. Japanese, Puerto Rican vs. Mexican, etc.)
27. Look for "crossover students"
28. Bring boys along
29. Be aware of your language and connotations or unintended meanings
30. Treat cultural fluidity as a skill to be attained
31. Deal with various types of violenceundefinedgangs, police violence, racial or other hate crimes, etc.undefinendnot just gender-based violence, patriarchal oppression, etc.
32. Learn to see the needs of the communityundefinendnot colorundefinendin your efforts to understand how best to address the concerns of the community

*-Linette Oliver*

33. Know that love is the energy that one brings to a process of transcendence
34. Internal self-exploration is what is needed to make a teacher flexible enough to be culturally fluid
35. Value and embrace change
36. Don't be afraid to go into a place that is new, different, or uncomfortable
37. Treat it as an obligation to make your classes accessible to low-income women by whatever means you can
38. Remember the stories your students tell you about themselves
39. Work with preexisting organizations in other communities



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–Janet Gee

40. Understand diversity within a diverse community (e.g., a Black person may be African American, Afro-Caribbean, Afro-Latino, or African; Latinas may be from the U.S. or from any of dozens of countries; Asians may be from the U.S. or from any of dozens of countries; etc.)
41. Be open
42. Be honest
43. Don't be afraid not to know
44. Don't be afraid to ask for a translation (language, new slang, body language)
45. Cultivate student leadership in your dojo/self-defense school, especially among the youth; bring them with you
46. Use popular culture to illustrate and examine the issues
47. Recognize that gender may not be as important within a community
48. Recognize that identity is fluid
49. Don't do things the same way the "old school" did
50. Realize that what works in theory may not work in actuality
51. Consider hiring translators (esp. Spanish translators)
52. Know that we all see situations through our own lens, and that lens is culture
53. Examine your own assumptions about people
54. Know that the "new racism"/3rd wave of racism is more latent, related to in-group identity, and more covert than "Klan-type" racism but still is potent and harmful

–Darlene DeFour

55. Be clear that everything (even time, concept of history, meanings of facial expressions, interpretations of body language) is affected by culture.
56. Ask your students about their experiences; examine how your own experiences inform your curriculum and your instruction methods.
57. Regularly review your role play material, hand-outs, and so on to see that they are up-to-date and relevant to the times and the population with that you work with.
58. Check your own responses to your students, like negating and affirming, making faces, calling on people to answer questions. What subtle (or obvious) messages are you sending?



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59. Foster honesty and be thick-skinned about the emotional content of your students' honesty with you.
60. Leave politics out and loving-kindness in.
61. Know that feminist rhetoric (though not so much feminist ideology) is often a big turn-off.
62. When someone says, "that would never work where I come from," ask them what would.
63. Don't be fake.
64. Show that you respect or understand (or want to understand) what your students value, even if it's not what you value.
65. Examine the subtext of your language or iconography; be open to feedback about both. That is, be aware that visual images carry cultural cues. Are yours mono-cultural (and exclusive), multicultural (and inclusive), or reasonably neutral/as universal as possible?
66. Share or elicit stories of uncommon heroism that are culture-proud (e.g., parents fleeing a civil war, grandparents in the civil rights movement, etc.).
67. Don't silence anyone (this is different than letting everyone talk all the time).
68. Be aware that people may not tell you you're irrelevant (but they may disengage emotionally or not show up again).
69. Leave an open door and let people come in.
70. Don't be imperial/colonial. That is, if you are from the dominant (White) culture and you set up a practice or a school in a minority community (Native American, Latino, Black, Asian) or in an economically disadvantaged community of any ethnicity or race, your student body and your staff should reflect the community you are in. Your practice should be relevant to the community's needs, and it should be affordable and otherwise accessible to the community. As a show of good faith, you should attend functions and enter institutions in that neighborhood. Integration and understanding are mutual and respectful. Colonialism, imperialism, and gentrification are racist and serve to further oppress already oppressed minorities.
71. Explore the scholarship/art of the "other". Read books, watch movies, and attend cultural events by (rather than about) the other people in your world in order to better understand the other people in your world.
72. To the best of your ability, pronounce people's names correctly (or ask how to), even if a student seems "ok" with your mispronunciation. Never make fun of someone's name or even their nickname.



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73. Know that, if you represent the power structure/dominant culture, and you work in a minority community, it will take time to build trust.
74. Make a personal connection with people before getting down to business.
75. Remember that even though there are many differences between us all, the most important things—love, dignity, joy—transcend culture.

–Sarah Trembath

76. Focus on the human traits that make us more similar than different. Everyone wants to be safe and know their family is safe.
77. Provide accurate realistic role plays, using language that would be associated with the crime and may include profanity; allow them to do the same; speak at their level
78. Stress the importance of developing a strong attitude (everyone, regardless of background, wants to feel self-confident and strong)
79. Provide handouts of safety tips that speak to your students' everyday activities
80. Demonstrate your own proficiency in the application of physical techniques, and your willingness and ability to answer their what-if questions
81. Give many examples of true stories with which your students can identify/that are accurate to the environment in which they live
82. Encourage "situation analyses" of media crime stories and personal experiences through which students can analyze the victim's behavior and see if the crime could have been avoided
83. Allow students to modify the techniques based on the way they think and the way they move; encourage individuality and creativity
84. Make it fun; keep a sense of humor
85. Realize that, for women of any race/ethnicity, being the only one of her race/ethnicity in a place is often uncomfortable, threatening, or plain old unappealing

–Zosia Gorbaty

86. Incorporate what your students want to explore into your lesson plans
87. Go in open
88. Normalize basic self-defense elements (like using one's voice loudly) if they are not already a valued part of one's culture



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89. Consider finding a middle ground between what you want them to do and what they normally do
90. See the skills that your students already possess (e.g., gay White men in San Francisco had more excellent environmental awareness than most other students)
91. Meet your students where they are
92. Know your population
93. Ask your client ahead of time what their concerns are; teach to that
94. Ask yourself ahead of time if you're willing to be vulnerable, even if it may get uncomfortable
95. Ask yourself how it feels to put yourself in a position of less power
96. See shifts in body language and ask your students how they are feeling
97. Realize that you may be an expert in self-defense, but they are experts in their neighborhood
98. Realize that martial arts is different than self-care and personal safety, to which self-defense belong; self-care and self-defense are very culture bound and culturally influenced and so should be adaptable (whereas martial arts are usually transmitted as they are learned)
99. Know that good teachers adjust to the student
100. Be culturally humble (as opposed or in addition to being "culturally competent")
101. Know that you aren't going to "know everything" about another culture, and that's all right!

*–Michele Elefante*

Suggestions extracted from interviews (by Sarah Trembath, panel facilitator) with 2007 and 2008 Self-Defense Instructors' Conference panelists Darlene DeFour, Michele Elefante, Janet Gee, Zosia Gorbaty, Linette Oliver, and Lauren Wheeler.