



Mental Skills for BJJ Competitors

Practical mental techniques
to enhance your
performance on the mats



Introduction

Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu is not just a physical battle but a mental one. Consistent success on the mats requires more than technical proficiency; it demands emotional control, resilience, and mental flexibility.

As a BJJ competitor, there are only three things you can train – your body, your skills, and your mind. All three are important, so how much time are you giving to each?

This guide explores proven psychological skills, designed to help you work on the mental side of your game to help you find your best on the mats.

The Foundations of Mental Strength in BJJ

Mental skills training is not about quick hacks but about developing long-term resilience and psychological flexibility.

This guide covers three key pillars:

- Mindfulness and Focus
- Emotional Regulation and Acceptance
- Commitment and Values-Driven Action



The Science: Mindfulness enhances present-moment awareness, helping you remain calm and focused under pressure, staying engaged rather than avoiding difficult thoughts and emotions.

Practical Exercises

Visualisation Practice:

- Close your eyes and picture yourself stepping onto the mats.
- Imagine executing each movement fluidly and successfully.
- Engage all senses: feel the mat underfoot, hear the sounds of training, and experience the emotional state of confidence and readiness.
- Repeat for 5-10 minutes daily.



Breath Awareness Drill:

- Find a quiet place to sit or stand.
- Close your eyes and take a deep breath in through your nose, counting to four.
- Hold for a moment, then slowly exhale through your mouth for a count of six.
- Repeat for 10 breaths, focusing only on the sensation of air entering and leaving your body.

Noticing and Letting Go:

- When a negative thought arises (e.g., “I can’t beat this opponent”), pause and take a deep breath.
- Mentally label the thought as “just a thought.”
- Remember, your thoughts aren’t always true and are there to help protect you, not help you grow.
- Visualise placing the thought on a leaf and watching it float down a stream.
- Return your focus to the present moment.

“You have power over your mind—not outside events. Realise this, and you will find strength.”

-Marcus Aurelius

Emotional Regulation and Acceptance

The Science: Struggling against difficult thoughts and emotions can increase distress and anxiety. The alternative is to accept discomfort while staying committed to your performance.

Practical Exercises

The Observer Self:

- Close your eyes and imagine your emotions as waves in the ocean.
- Picture them rising and falling, but recognise that you are not the waves—you are the deep, steady water beneath.
- Allow emotions to come and go without resisting them.

“It’s not what happens to you, but how you react that matters”

-Epictetus

Defusion Technique:

- Identify a self-critical thought (e.g., “I’m not good enough”).
- Repeat the thought, in your head or even out loud, in a silly voice or sing it to the tune of “Happy Birthday.”
- Notice how the thought loses its emotional grip.
- Remind yourself that thoughts are just words, not facts.

“Avoid over-identification with emotions. Neither suppress them nor be controlled by them”

-The Middle Way

Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR):

- Find a comfortable position and close your eyes.
- Start at your feet: tense the muscles for 5-10 seconds, then slowly release while focusing on the sensation of relaxation.
- Move upward through your body: calves, thighs, abdomen, shoulders, arms, hands, and face.
- Take deep breaths throughout and notice how your body relaxes with each release.
- Use before training, after a tough session, or before competition to manage stress

Commitment and Values Driven Action

The Science: Motivation fluctuates, but a commitment to your values (e.g., perseverance, courage, discipline) provides a stable foundation for action.



Practical Exercises

Clarify Your Values:

- Write down why you train BJJ beyond winning (e.g., self-improvement, growth, resilience, connection).
- Identify three core values that guide your training.
- Each week, reflect on whether your actions align with these values.
- When faced with hard situations or choices, work to make the choice that moves you towards your values, not away from them.

Acceptance of Struggle:

- Before a hard session, acknowledge that discomfort is part of growth.
- Repeat to yourself: "This will be tough, and I will embrace it."
- After training, reflect on how you handled challenges and what you learned.

Goal Setting Exercise: Use the SMART method to set clear goals:

- Specific: Define exactly what you want to achieve (e.g., "Improve my guard passing").
- Measurable: Track progress (e.g., "Drill guard passes for 20 minutes every session").
- Achievable: Set a goal within your ability level.
- Relevant: Ensure it aligns with your long-term BJJ development.
- Time-bound: Set a deadline for achieving it.
- Write down and review your goals weekly.

Commitment and Values Driven Action

Practical Exercises

Self-Talk Reframing:

- Notice when non-productive self-talk arises (e.g., “I always get stuck inside control”).
- Question whether this is 100% true, which it very rarely, if ever, is!
- Replace it with a more helpful or constructive phrase (e.g., instead of “I always get stuck inside control,” say “I’m learning to improve my escapes”).
- Repeat affirmations that reinforce confidence and resilience.



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**Pain is inevitable,
but suffering is
optional.**

-Buddhist Teaching

“

**Difficulties
strengthen the
mind, as labour
does the body.**

-Seneca

Conclusion & Next Steps

True mental toughness is not about eliminating fear, doubt, or discomfort, it's about learning to move forward despite them. By integrating mindfulness, emotional acceptance, and values-based action into your BJJ practice, you cultivate a mind that is as sharp as your technique.

- Implement one exercise from each section in your daily training.
- Reflect on your performance beyond wins and losses; what mental skills did you use?
- Train your mind, and your body will follow.



We're here to help you find your best.

Get in touch today with any questions, or to arrange your free 30 minute consultation.



graham@insio.biz



www.insio.biz



insio.mental.performance