



presents

Stunt School

How to react to various punches for stunts — part 1

with Ray Anthony

As a professional stunt performer, martial artist and fight choreographer, Ray Anthony constantly working on film sets with fighters and actors to perfect their movements and reactions for their fight scenes.



Ray in his on-set boxing gear.

Here, Ray explains how to react to various punches and kicks and how to make them work for you on a film set.

REACTIONS TO NON-CONTACT PUNCHES

Firstly, I always warm-up prior to beginning a non-contact film-fighting scene. I find the neck is the most important part, given that the head is always the first body part that moves to any reaction. The neck is also the easiest to hurt if not warmed up, therefore I spend a little extra time on this area.

Once warmed up, I put down a mark on the floor next to my foot for myself and another one for my partner. The mark could either be a bit of tape, chalk or even a small stick depending on what floor surface you're fighting on. Such a mark guarantees us that we won't move from those points and the correct distance is always maintained from scene to scene. This is monitored after every scene, more so for when we're making contact. With non-contact fighting we have a slight gap for errors. Also, don't forget about 'going limp'.

JABS TO THE FACE

Have the actor measure the impact position to your face to ensure no contact will be made during the fight scene. A good idea is to throw five quick punches and react to them quickly to get used to the head snapping back and forward before filming starts.

My first reaction would be to snap the head back after the actor's fist crosses my chin path — don't worry about seeing a gap, we can adjust the camera to make it look real later. I then start to step back and lower my legs, preparing my body for the fall.

As I go down from the jab to the face, I'm not going to be able to spot the floor for the fall as we normally do. The camera will pick this up when you turn your head and the reaction will not look right due to the line of impact of the punch, which is coming from straight ahead. Therefore, your reaction must be to go straight back. To cushion the fall, I bend my legs to absorb most of the impact, and proceed to fall onto my back. Not all jabs to the face will make you fall; most will just cause you to stumble back.

HOOK TO THE JAW

Zuzana measures the impact position on my face, allowing me to know exactly where the line of the hook is coming from (photo 1, top), which makes my reaction easier to judge.

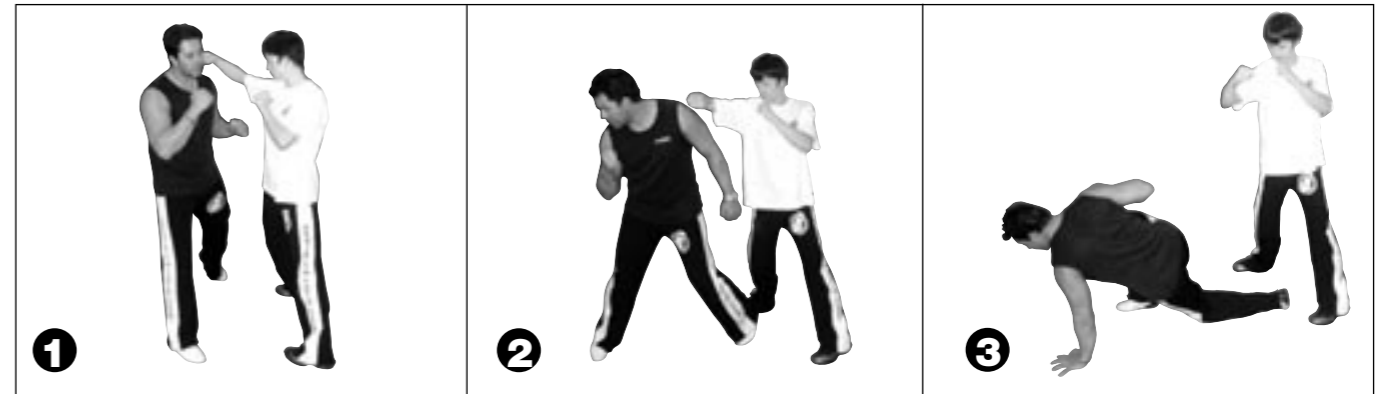
Once the hook has been thrown and the fist has passed your chin, the first movement should come from the head, followed by the body (photo 2). Be careful not to premeditate your reaction. Your line of sight should be facing down getting ready for the fall.

As your body turns and motions towards the floor you can use your hand as cushioning to absorb some of the impact (photo 3). It is advisable to do this to avoid injuries to your back.

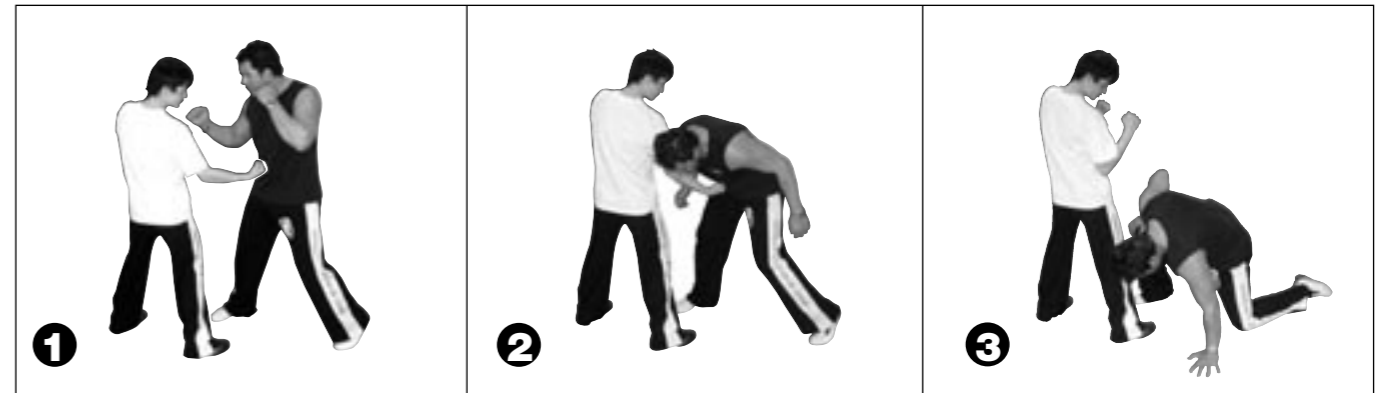
Once you fall, let your body dictate where it's going to end up. Don't restrict your movement.

PUNCH TO THE STOMACH

Have the actor line up the stomach punch position to give



Hook to the jaw



Uppercut to the Stomach

yourself the right position for the reaction. With stomach punches we must be careful not to go too high or too low, which could injure an actor or fellow fighter. I personally like to feel a slight impact on my stomach during this hit as it gives me a better reaction. A small armadillo pad on the front can also be used if there's any contact. Keep in mind that most actors don't like to be touched.

For some reason, most film fighters tend to go backwards when getting hit in the stomach. Anyone who has been hit by a good mid-section punch knows that your upper body gets thrown forward. Therefore, when reacting to a such a punch, you should be bending over and spotting the floor for a fall. Avoid moving your feet forward during your reaction as it could crowd the actor's space and make them trip over.

Cushion your fall down with your hand so that your knees don't take the full impact. Knee pads should be used for better impact if your costume allows it.

UPPERCUT PUNCH

After lining up the punch to the face and marking the floor for your feet position, I perform several slow-motion rehearsals with the actor for timing purposes — after all, the upper cut punch to the face is one of the hardest to perfect and sell for the camera.

As the punch just passes the chin, travelling upwards, your head should snap backwards, followed by your chest sticking out slightly and your back arching in preparation for the stumble backwards.

As you proceed to follow the motion backwards, you have a couple of options: one is to go to the ground and fall. Should this be your selection, follow the same method as the 'jab to the face reaction'. Option two is to lean back and stumble, but not fall to the ground. Option three, which is the hardest, is to

perform a complete flip backwards and land on your stomach — something we call a 'gaynor'. I've done this version many times on set and have to say it looks great. However it is very dangerous and should only be attempted by skilled performers. Choose carefully because ultimately you are responsible for your own actions on a film set.

REACTIONS AND GOING LIMP

Recapping on a subject that we discussed in a previous issue, I've always believed that a good film-fighting martial artist must know how to fall and react safely every time. At some stage in your film-fighting career, you'll go down in response to another's action. If you don't know how to fall properly and perform the reaction correctly, you won't get used or the director will bring in a stunt double. The best way to learn is to do some basic gymnastic or judo classes — both are excellent for this type of training. The most important thing about falls is to 'spot', which means to look at the area where you're going to fall.

The term 'going limp' means to relax your body movement and not be rigid upon impact. Your reflex action should not be mechanical but natural and believable. We practice this by relaxing the entire body and throwing the arms and torso side to side, like a washing machine. This helps very much to relax the body for reactions. Another way is to practice throwing yourself around in a pool, like your being hit or kicked. The water acts as padding and prevents injuries that you'd normally get from a hard surface.

Ray Anthony has 18 years experience in martial arts, dance and gymnastics. He has worked on over 60 productions, including feature films Star Wars II, Crocodile Dundee, Mission Impossible 2 and the Matrix trilogy. ATKD