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Stunt School

How to react to various kicks for stunts — part 2

with Ray Anthony

As a professional stunt performer, martial artist and fight choreographer, Ray Anthony is constantly working on film sets with actors and fighters to perfect their movements and reactions for fight scenes. Here, he gives more tips on kicking for the camera.



Ray busts a move on set.

Unfortunately we can't discuss all the kicks involved in film fighting but I will discuss those most commonly used by performers.

Reactions to semi-contact kicks

Firstly, always warm up. Especially for kicks, give yourself a good stretch, preferably with your fighting partner. This helps break the ice with new actors and gives you an insight into what level they're at, and a chance to talk about the fight moves coming up.

Once I'm ready for a rehearsal, I put a mark on the floor next to my foot for myself and another one for my partner. I might use tape, chalk or even a small stick, depending on what surface I'm fighting on. This ensures that we won't move from those marks and the correct distance is maintained for every take. I monitor this after every scene has been shot. More so for

semi-contact stunts; with non-contact fighting we have a slight gap for errors.

Kick to the back

1 – Zuzana again measures the impact position on my back, allowing me to know exactly where the impact of the kick is coming from, which makes my reaction easier to determine.

2 – Once the kick has been thrown and the impact is made on the back, you should start to move forward with an arched back, simultaneously raising your head. Be careful not to premeditate your reaction. You should be looking forward, preparing to fall and spot.

3 – As your body moves towards the floor, use your hand to cushion the impact, or go into a forward roll, depending on what the choreography demands. Once you fall, 'go limp' and let your body dictate where it's going to end up. Don't restrict your movement.

Kicks to the face

1 – Zuzana measures the impact position to my face, so that no contact will be made during the kick. It's difficult and dangerous to sell a head-kick with contact; the kicker must have great kicking control to achieve this, so it's much easier and safer for the director to use different camera angles to change the impact line to the head. Don't forget to give your head a few light snaps back and forward before filming starts, to loosen it up.

2 – By changing the camera angle to the back view of Zuzana, we can create the same effect and with less safety issues. After Zuzana delivers the kick, my first reaction would be to snap the head back, then start to step back and lower my legs, preparing my body for the fall, if that's what the director wants.

3 – As I go down, I won't 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 won't look right. The kick is coming from straight ahead, so your reaction must take you straight back.

4 – I cushion the fall by bending my legs to absorb most of the impact and proceed to fall onto my back (for which you can wear an armadillo pad). Not all kicks to the face will make you fall, but most will.

Front-kick to the stomach

1 – Zuzana lines up for the kick, which gives me the right position for the reaction. With stomach kicks, we must be careful not to go to high or to low, which could injure an actor or fellow fighter. I like to feel a slight impact on my stomach when we do these hits, depending on the performer. It helps give me a better reaction. Depending on wardrobe requirements, you may be able to put a small armadillo protector on your front. Keep in mind that most actors don't like to be touched!

2 – When getting hit in the stomach with a kick, most film fighters tend to go backwards, but keep in mind that it's a kick not a push-kick. If you've ever been hit with a good mid-section kick you'll know it's going to double you over forwards

like a bag of potatoes, which means that your reaction should be bending forward and spotting the floor for a fall. Try not to move your feet forward on the reaction, as it can crowd the actor's space and make them trip over.

3 – It helps if you cushion your fall slightly with your hand, so your knees don't take the full impact of your weight hitting the floor. Whether you go down fully or just to one knee and act a bit injured, will depend on the director or the fight choreographer. If it won't affect your costume, you can wear knee pads for better impact to the floor. Keep in mind that a kick usually has more power than a punch, so your reaction should be adjusted to suit that force. Don't be too quick to get up. After a solid kick to the stomach, you would be wounded and should act like it.

Reactions and 'going limp'

The best way to learn how to fall safely and look right doing it is to do some basic gymnastics or judo classes. The most important thing is to 'spot', meaning to look at where you're going to fall and not fall blindly. 'Going limp' involves relaxing your body and head so as not to be rigid upon impact. Your reflex action should look natural and believable. **ATKD**