

Fighting a Taller Opponent in Boxing and MMA



Fighting a taller opponent – Fedor Vs some giant dude

Ever wondered how to fight someone taller than you? Course you have that's why you're here...the following are my tips for boxing or fighting a taller opponent and/or a bigger opponent, I hope they help:

1. **Get in the pocket & counter-strike**

If you are short, or short for your weight class like me, then you pretty much have to get used to taking a jab. Take it on your forehead if you have to, but try not to back up. Ideally you'll slip and counter, or block and counter, or even, as mentioned, take it on your forehead by keeping your chin right down.

You have to be really tough for this to work, which unfortunately I am definitely not. Taller guys can keep safe, at the end of a jab, and win fights without taking any damage at all. It's not as easy for a shorter fighter, generally speaking you have to be more aggressive and get stuck in.

If you continually back up after a jab, you'll never get in your own range and you won't be able to counter. If possible you want to move forward, and just 'walk through' your opponents jab.

For example, if you and your partner are both in orthodox stance (left foot forwards) you could practice parrying a jab and stepping forward (and to the side a bit) with a right foot.

As outlined in my amazing illustration:



- Step forwards and to the side with your rear leg as your jab
- Protect the side of your head with your arm and elbow
- Move your head to the side too
- Don't stay in that position
- Throw an overhand right, or right roundhouse and move your head back to the middle or you'll eat a kick
- This is a technique I made up, please don't be angry if it doesn't work for you

Jab Normal – Then Step forward with back foot and jab again

Remember, you do this to **counter your opponent's jab –**

Move your head to the right and off centre line, then throw your own jab.

I like to do a normal jab, then follow up immediately with this “step-through” version.

If countering with a jab doesn't work, do the same thing but throw an inside leg kick, or front kick instead of a jab.

You can also try Wing Chun ‘elbow destroys’. Instead of parrying your partner's jab, bring your right elbow up, so the point of your elbow clashes with his fist.

Same goes for his kicks.

Step into any of your opponent's round kicks and counter with a punch.

Sweep away or grab hold of a front kick/teep with your hand (keep your other hand up) & counter. You can also block a front kick to the body by lifting your knee up (similar to how you'd block a low thai roundhouse).

Drill slipping a jab and countering kicks. Drill it lots. I still ‘forget’ to do it if I don't practice. It's instinct to back away when someone's throwing limbs at you.

It'll probably give you brain damage, but I also like to do this drill:

Boxer 1 is up against the ropes/cage with hands behind his back

Boxer 2 jabs Boxer 1 in the forehead and hooks & crosses him to the body.

Boxer 1 has to try and keep his eyes open throughout and try not to flinch away.

Don't make the mistake of throwing from too far out. See the first Ken Shamrock V Tito fight at UFC 40 for a good example. Ken was throwing combos in the second round and was missing the mark by about half a foot. Ken was then picked off by straight punches from the longer Tito.

Again, practice parrying a jab with your right hand (tap the wrist of a left jab towards your left shoulder if you stand in left-lead stance), and slipping your head to the right of the jab.

It's hard to get your distance. I remember I always used to throw from miles too far out, and lean back at the same time to avoid getting punched myself. I used to think if I could just about reach with a headbutt or elbow, then I'll punch, otherwise I'll just feint punches or throw a 'feeler' jab. This worked for me. Obviously don't throw a headbutt or elbow unless your fighting a tiger or something.

When you're better at controlling distancing, and moving in and out, and getting your timing right; then you can play around with holding your ground and countering, and using footwork to move away, pivot etc. Instead of just holding your ground and countering every single time.

Standing your ground and trading is more of a traditional Muay Thai style. It does work, but you may prefer to pick and choose when to stay in the pocket, and when to move out of range. Boxing seems to be more about hitting, without being hit, and as a result has more footwork, pivoting and head-movement; Thai boxers stand and trade more; or at least, stand and counter-strike.

Skip to 2 mins into the video. These guys seem to stand and trade, rather than move about and use head-movement, like you see in boxing:

Not sure it's the best style for MMA, unless you don't mind getting taken down.

I would only throw a punch from far out, if it is a jab, and you are trying to create a reaction from the opponent and draw them into your range. Rousey likes to jab her way into the clinch. She throws a jab, or a double jab, and often her opponents react by throwing back, at which point she can slip and get the clinch.

See Bruce Lee's [5 ways of attack](#) – single strike attacks, combination attacks, attack by drawing (e.g. throwing a jab, to get your opponent to stand his/her ground and throw back), indirect attack & hand immobilisation attack.

If the guy is stronger and taller, **avoid the clinch** at all costs. Unless you've got a specifically strong Greco/Judo/Thai clinch game.

A great way to get into your own range, is to make him come to you. Don't constantly chase him down, instead you can stay well out of his kicking range, and make him move towards you. Keep moving and throwing feints, when he jabs, step into the jab, and counter.

Nick Diaz did a good job of making Anderson come to him. Taller guys usually expect you to chase them.



In contrast, here's Conor McGregor (who won their first round) walking down Nate Diaz and slipping the right jab, and countering with a left cross. No hesitation – that's one of the keys to this – people get too afraid to open up and throw the counter



Note the way he mixed this up in the first round though, not continually pressing



[Gif Source](#)

2. Bob and weave

Have a look at some Mike Tyson Videos on youtube. Notice that he tends to throw a jab, or simply walk forwards and then slip, slip then bob and weave when he's in his opponent range. Often he'll bob and weave really low so that a jab can't have any affect. Either way, he closes the distance up against the ropes, and importantly, he gets his opponent to engage and throw strikes before countering with his own hooks and uppercuts.

This is more risky in MMA, as you can end up eating a knee. But experiment with it; it's certainly worth watching Tyson in his prime.

Ideally you'll bob and weave until you back your opponent up against the cage or ropes, then you can start your 'in-fighting' with hooks and uppercuts.

Change your level by squatting, as well as moving your head side to side. In boxing you can get away with dropping your level and head so you are 'below' the punches. In thai or MMA you can get kneed in the head though.

I'd still drill and practice this for MMA; perhaps use it sparingly though.

You might look a bit stupid, but you can also move forwards – with both hands up and arms, kind-of crossed. This makes it awkward to throw a punch (helps if you really move your head to one side) but it's near impossible for the opponent to land

to your head. See 2:21 to about 2:27 to see what I mean. I'm not sure if this style of guard has an official name:

Moving forward constantly also makes it really hard for a taller guy to throw roundhouse style kicks. But makes front kicks more effective, and jumping knees – so be wary.

3. Use the double jab

The double jab is **awesome**, for setting up everything from takedowns to overhand rights and Thai roundhouse kicks. Use this to keep or get yourself in range. Keep your chin down and your rear hand in front of your chin.

I like to jab, jab again and as I step forwards with the second jab, shoot for a double leg takedown. Mind you don't walk onto a counter-jab, keep your chin tucked and/or off centre-line

1. Jab and step forwards by pushing off from your back foot



2. Jab and push off from back foot again but use this second step as your double leg shoot



I also use the double jab a lot, but move to the side, helping set up an angle for a kick.

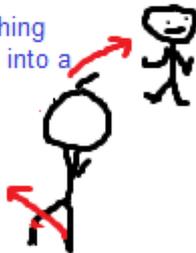
Double Jab Moving Diagonally is Great for closing the distance

In Left Lead

1.
- Push off on your right foot
- Jab as you move forwards and to the left



2.
Do the same thing again to turn it into a double jab



3.
After the 2nd jab, throw a right roundhouse



**Danger is walking into an overhand right or a kick.
Jab with your thumb upwards so your chin is covered by your shoulder**

4. Jab with your head to the side/at an angle

If you are both using your jab, the taller opponent will keep you at bay and outreach you every time. However, if you move your head out of centre-line when you are jabbing, your opponent may find it difficult to catch you.

Jabbing with your head moved to the side, and slightly forwards, will increase your reach and help you to avoid your opponent's jab.

Be careful not to move into a left hook or roundhouse though.

Against Jon Jones Gus' was constantly moving his head to his right as he jabbed, and eventually got caught with a kick and a spinning elbow.

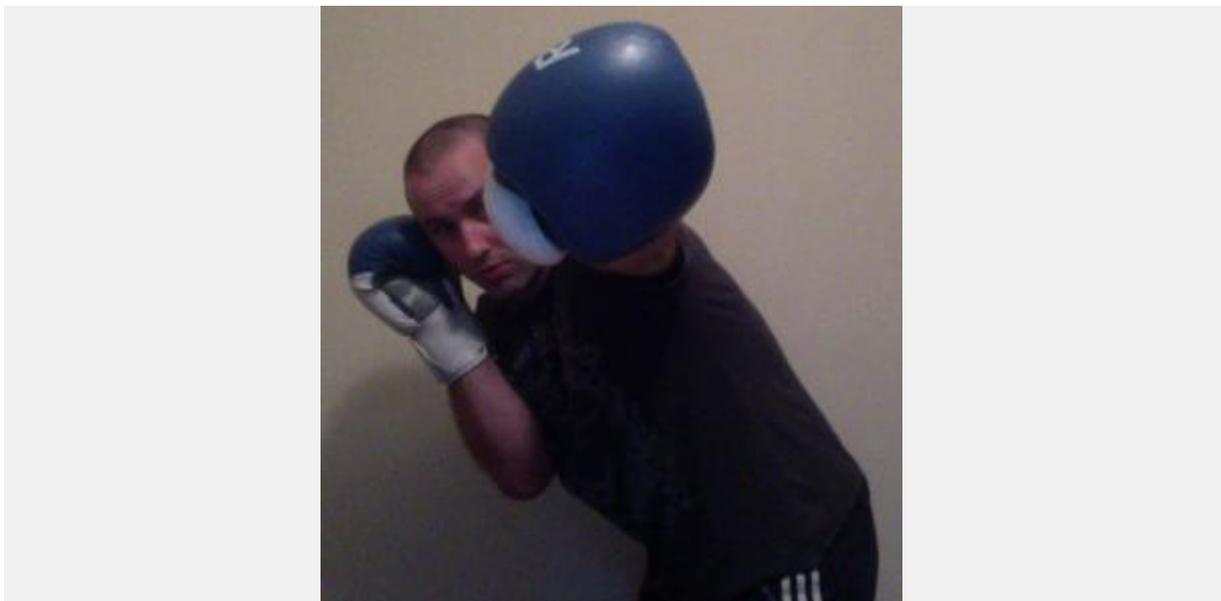
If you slip your head to the right as you jab with your left hand, then keep you right hand up against your right ear or even against your left ear, so your forearm protects your face and your right elbow protects the right hand side of your head.

Don't leave your head in that position, come back into the middle with your left hand protecting the left hand side of your face, or bob and weave.

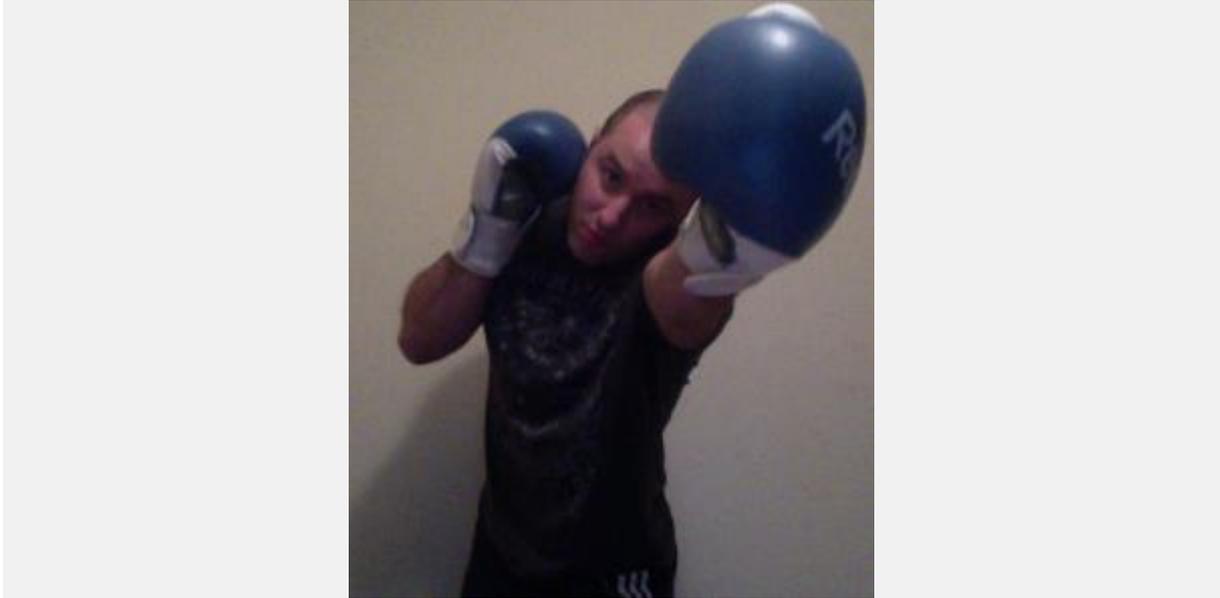
Unless you're He-man



<http://chasevariant.blogspot.co.uk/2010/04/dc-vs-masters-of-universe-he-man.html>



Jab with head to the side. Turn thumb down at the end of the punch.



Jab with head to the left. Keep left shoulder up to protect chin

5. Overhand Right

Set this up Dan Henderson style with an inside leg kick and then slam your foot down and throw your punch like you're bowling a cricket ball. Look at the guys toes and swing your head down, making it a whole body and core movement like smashing with a sledge hammer, rather than just a movement of the arm.

Be wary of an uppercut counter.

Here's a really good video of someone doing an overhand right. The video seemed to illustrate the movement better than the pictures. The power comes mainly from your core. Hitting a sledgehammer into a tyre or chopping wood are two good ways of building overhand right power.

You can do a really looping overhand, like a bowling action with your arm straight momentarily, or you can do a 'shorter' version with your elbow bent throughout.

Use the "power angle" – coming downwards at 45 degrees

6. Russian hooks

See the Mark Hunt Analysis for Russian hooks. Your throw the punch with your arm rotated and the thumb turned down towards the floor. This gives it more range.



Russian Hook Start



Russian Hook End

This is a favourite technique of Fedor, and the Hunt-man himself:



It has the power of a normal hook, but a range similar to a jab

7. Use the 'step through'

A classic example of this is the 'Vitor Blitz' against Wanderlai Silva in Brazil.

He throws a straight left, then steps forward with his right foot and throws a straight right, then steps forward with his left foot and throws another left, etc.

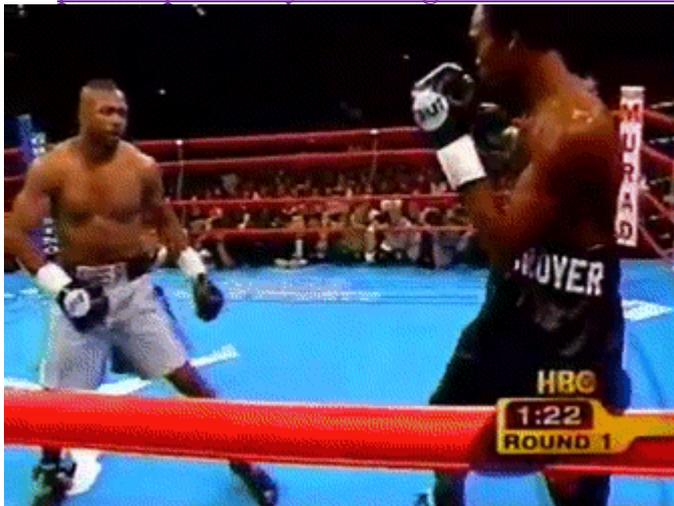
Don't do a whole 'blitz' everytime, but you can experiment with stepping forwards with your right foot (if you are in orthodox stance), moving into a southpaw stance and throwing the cross at the same time. This obviously gives you much more range,

but can be telegraphed/too slow.

Try it also with the double jab, jab as normal, and then on the second jab, step forwards with your right foot.

Here's a video instructional on the Vitor Blitz:

Here's Roy Jones using a step-through. At the start of the GIF, notice how his right leg moves forwards as he throws the punch with his right hand. He is able to throw the [punch quicker by throwing it from his waist](#):



In left-lead stance, I like to squat down as if I'm going to go for a takedown, then throw an uppercut as I step forward with my right leg (keeping my head to the right hand side), then throw a left cross.

At UFC 185, against Overeem, Roy Nelson appeared to get a knock-down by throwing an uppercut as he moved his right foot forward into south-paw stance, and then landed a looping hook stepping forward into orthodox.

Just be careful you don't walk into a strike, like Forrest Griffin did against Anderson Silva. Keep your chin tucked, elbows and shoulders high.

8. Counter Jab, with a jab and a step forward

This is completely unorthodox, and something I kind of made up.

If you are both in orthodox stance / left lead

When a tall guy throws his jab:

Slip your head to the right of his jab

Step forwards and to the side with your right foot

Throw a jab right down the middle, as you step forward

This way, even if his arms are twice as long as yours; as you are stepping forward and jabbing, you should still be able to land.

9. Learn a counter front kick / teep counter

I'd say **this is the 2nd most important thing to practice**, behind countering the jab. Whether it be a takedown, a 'scoop' with your hand, a spinning kick or a side step, you'll need a good counter if you're fighting taller guys. You can usually block it just by raising your knee as you would to block a roundhouse.

You can also dodge most front kicks to the body by sucking your belly in and throwing your feet and hips back. Just make sure at least 1 hand is still protecting your face.

A block is good, but obviously an effective counter is much better.

Drill blocking by lifting your leg up, then countering with your own kick.

Try shifting your hips back, grabbing the kick and sweeping his standing leg.

10. Counter a punch with a kick

Stay in the pocket, keep your chin tucked, move your head out of centre-line and counter punches with kicks.

If you are both in orthodox stance, your left leg will be pretty close to his left leg, but you'll probably get less power on an inside leg kick than a normal roundhouse.

If a kick to the Thai doesn't do much damage, you can try kicking the calf, or even stamping/side kicking his knee (although I wouldn't risk injuring someone's knee with this in training).

Countering punches with kicks is one of my favourite ever techniques. Perhaps because I don't like getting punched, or punching people in the face too much (in training, never know how hard to go). I'll throw jabs to 'engage' the striking, then cover up and throw low kicks. Mix it up with inside kicks, front kicks and maybe a knee or you'll get the kicks checked.

11. Throw Feints

Change up your rhythm, twitch your shoulders, move your head off 'centre-line', lift your knee up, dummy a jab – then throw a jab straight afterwards. Keep the other guy guessing constantly.

You may also want to try circling, usually to your right, away from the other fella's power hand. This may work in boxing, better than with Thai

Constantly drop your level and make your opponent think about the takedown. Just bend your legs and drop your shoulders.

A good technique is dropping your level and then touching the opponent's leading knee and switching to an uppercut with the same hand.

12. Superman Punches

I've been caught out using these a few times, and ended up jumping onto a front kick or a jab.

Keep one hand up, to protect your face. You can even protect it with your elbow.
There is the superman jab:



SuperMan Jab

- Standing in left lead
- Raise your left knee to hip height
- Push/hop forwards with your right foot and throw your left leg back for momentum
- Throw jab

This is a great technique, follow up with a right roundhouse as shown by GSP above. You can even follow up with a left front kick or teep. Instead of putting your left leg down on the floor, after you throw your jab. Throw a left front kick instead.

I sometimes follow up with an orthodox superman punch:



Interestingly, in the above GIF, which I've borrowed from mma-core.com , 1 guy is wearing leggings.

Also, the fella throwing the punch leaves himself really open, I'd recommend being tighter with your guard than this; if possible, we all do things incorrect in fights. Interestingly, he also seems to throw a jab before his superman punch. This might be a combination/feint to try out.

13. Video your sparring

This helps immensely. I haven't found it much use with BJJ, but for stand up, and MMA sparring, filming allows you to view yourself more objectively. It's crazy what you do incorrectly and don't realise it.

14. Get a good single leg and double leg takedown

If you're short, you have the advantage of being at a low level, and being able to get under your opponent's hips easier.

If someone has long and skinny legs, they are usually more susceptible to a takedown than a shorter, stockier fellow.

I like to shoot for a single – i.e. grab hold of their lead leg, go for a 'run-the-pipe' takedown and change it into a double.

Search on youtube for "Single leg takedown" and of course "double leg takedown"

Try not to shoot from too far out.

Practice setting up the takedowns, with a double jab (see above), and by slipping your opponent's jab and dropping under it.

I even like to shoot for a double leg after a superman punch. It seems to work, unorthodox techniques seem to be the easiest to pull off as nobody predicts what you're attempting.

15. Butterfly Guard

On the ground, one of the main differences is going to be how easily your closed guard will be broken.

Drill some open guard, and butterfly guard basics

16. Watch Short Guys Fight

Don't reinvent the wheel, stand on the shoulders of giants...or smaller people.

Watch Randy Couture V Tim Sylvia – loads of head movement, greco takedowns and of course that overhand-right at the very start.

Watch Mark Hunt's fights, Melvin Manhoef, Mike Tyson, Rashad Evans, Sean Sherk, Fedor.

Look at what type of strikes and takedowns they use. Their head movement, footwork and combinations.

17. Practice In-fighting, including Thai Clinch

Have a look for "boxing in-fighting" on youtube.

You may have to literally WALK forwards. Pushing off from your rear-foot and sliding forwards, sometimes won't work.

Again, watch Tyson. Watch how he moves forwards, through and/or underneath people's jabs, and backs them against the ropes.

Liver punch, left hook to the head, and then a right uppercut is a classic combination.

Drop your level, don't raise up too far (if at all) when throwing the left hook to the head.

Keep your elbows in.

You should also work on Thai-clinch, with emphasis on defence.

Practice pummeling for neck/head control, and different defenses.

For example, pushing on the opponents chin, pushing up on one of his elbows and pulling downwards on the bicep of his opposite hand, turning your hips side on etc.

One 'emergency' way to block a knee, is by throwing your own knee upwards at the same time.

Strengthen your neck and lower back too, so your posture can't be broken down.

Of course, you can also punch your way out of a clinch too.

18. Either move forward or circle – drawing occasionally

Don't stand at range and 'think' about what you're going to do. Your default mode should be pressing forward. Literally walk forward, step forward with your left and then your right foot, keep your chin tucked behind your front shoulder.

Use the front kick counters you've worked on and slip inside and outside of the jab and counter with kicks and/or takedowns.

If your opponent is using oblique kicks – Jon Jones Style:



<http://www.bloodyelbow.com>

you may have to 'dummy' moving forwards, sidestep more and circle more to prevent yourself walk straight into it.

Work on a counter to the oblique kick too. I'll be honest, I've never drilled any but you can block it by lifting your leg up, I imagine you could counter by:

Checking the kick by lifting you leg up

Then as you put your foot back down on the floor step forwards (in one movement,

don't put your foot back on the floor and then step)

Counter with a double leg takedown or a roundhouse to the leg he's just kicked with

19. Emergency Techniques

So you're into the final round of your fight against a tall guy (or any guy really) and you just can't bridge the gap in range.

You might need to try some higher risk techniques.

Try countering his jab with a spinning back fist.

Shoot for a low single or ankle pick.

Try grabbing his low kicks

Try bobbing and weaving at a ridiculously high pace

Start using a side-kick or an oblique kick to the knee every time your opponent engages

The point is – always have a plan B. You see a lot of fighters get frustrated and mentally give-in when their game plan just doesn't work.

Summary – How to Fight Someone Taller than You

- Don't fight at his range – press forward or circle on the outside
- You must find a way to 'move through' the jabs and front kicks, if you back away from them you'll be stuck at long-range
- Try and get him to engage with 'feeler' strikes like a quick jab and when he fires back, slip your head to the side and counter with a kick, punch or takedown
- Constantly drill front kick and jab counters (a jab-counter I love is to parry the jab and step forwards with my right foot and land a right jab of my own)
- Constantly drop your level and mix up feints with takedowns to land strikes and vice versa
- You must jab with your head to the side or with your chin really tucked
- The most successful technique against a tall guy appears to be an inside leg kick as a jab counter. It lands the most but obviously doesn't do as much damage as an overhand right.

– Work on explosive power and also endurance. The best short guys all seem to be either mega explosive (e.g. Hector Lombard) and/or have a really high work rate (Cain – fairly short for a HW).

– If you are short and stocky, chances are, wrestling will be your strength. Keep working on all aspects of your game though, don't give up on the striking or the guard game.

– Don't look up at his face, or your chin will stick out, Look forwards.

Drills to Practice

1. Thai clinch fighting/pummeling and defence

2. Ideally with a tall partner, practice MMA sparring, but he is trying to keep the fight standing, and you are trying to take him down

3. Infighting – finding range. Spar with your partner; but only with jabs. Your goal is to back your partner up against the ropes/cage and land your own jab. You must keep walking forwards; you lose if you back up from a jab (parry it and move your head to the side)

4. The same as above, but your partner can only throw a front kick and a jab~

5. Practice parrying your opponent's jab and throwing your own as a counter

6. On the pads – inside leg kick, overhand right combo.

– Step-through Blitz (see the Vitor video above)

– Jab to the body, overhand right combo.

– Double jab into a takedown

– Double jab moving forwards and to the left, right roundhouse combo

– Slip jab and land an inside leg kick

7. Practice walking forwards –

Step forwards with your right foot & slip your head to the right

Step forwards with your left foot & slip your head to the left

Step forwards with your right foot & squat down/duck as you move to the right

Step forwards with your left foot & squat down/duck as you move to the right

– Practice this with a partner too. Get him to throw a jab, cross, hook, hook combo
Take a look at this video from 2.30:

Rather than shuffling forwards, I try to walk forwards. But maybe that's why I'm rubbish.

Tyson seems to walk rather than push/shuffle forwards, at least when he's out of range – check out 3 mins in:

Finally, the best example ever – Randy V Tim Sylvia

Notice Randy's constant side to side hand movement as he throws over hand lefts and rights; he also drops his level lots and uses foot sweeps to destroy the giant:

Bonus Tip

Just watched UFC fight night in Brazil and saw a good tall vs short fight (can't remember the fighters name unfortunately).

The shorter guy was using the inside leg kick brilliantly. Both fighters were in orthodox stance, so their left legs were pretty close to each other.

He was smashing his shin into the calf and thigh.

This is definitely the easiest and closest weapon you have.

Be very careful of a counter right hand, straight down the middle.

Follow up your kicks with punches, practices feinting the inside leg kick and throwing a jab too, or even a Hendo style overhand right