

## Chunking for Judo Instructors

by Mark Lonsdale

No, this is not the popular mid-west sport of launching pumpkins from an air-powered canon, but the art of delivering information in manageable blocks of instruction, or chunks.

A commonly observed weakness with some teachers is talking too much – often jokingly referred to as “being in love with the sound of their own voices.” And yes, there are judo instructors out there who can talk a class to death, particularly at clinics. We have all heard participants at poorly structured judo clinics complain that the presenter demonstrated “twenty-six techniques or variations before letting the class practice.” These clinicians need to understand that teaching is not about stroking one’s own ego, and more importantly, that this goes against the accepted doctrine of 15% teaching & 85% doing, particularly in skills-based sports such as judo.

Coming into a class unprepared is bad enough, but inundating students with information is equally egregious. In both cases the principles of teaching and laws of learning are being violated. When teaching skills, particularly new skills, the learning process is most effective if the information is delivered in manageable chunks. So what is a manageable amount of information?

It is generally accepted that students can remember about seven points, plus or minus two, and depending on the individual and complexity of the subject. This is part of the reason that telephone numbers have seven digits and social security numbers have nine.

With this in mind, it is recommended that instructors teach judo in chunks of no more than four points at a time. For example, in approaching a new standing technique (*tachi-waza*), the instructor will demonstrate the technique in its totality, from grip and *kuzushi* to completion of the throw. This also conforms to the first step in the recommended Whole-Part-Whole method of teaching. The instructor will then break the technique down to its component parts. This begins with the optimum stance, grip and body position, and then moves to the initial hand and body movements to initiate the balance breaking.

Once the students have had a chance to practice the grip and balance breaking the instructor will introduce the foot movement, often by comparing its similarity to previously learned techniques. For example, *ippon-seoinage*, *morote-seoinage*, *o-goshi*, and several *koshi-waza* all have similar initial foot placement. The role of the pulling hand (*hikite*) is also similar, but the placement and role of the lifting hand (*tsurite*) can be quite different – around the waist for *o-goshi*; around the neck for *koshi-guruma*; or under the arm for *ippon-seoinage*.

Once the *kuzushi* and *tsukuri* have been dealt with, the instructor may demonstrate the correct head position, turning motion, and finishing technique (*kake*) to complete the throw in a safe, balanced and controlled manner. So while the technique is broken down into four chunks of information, each chunk is made up of three or four finer learning points.

Once the basic teaching/learning process has been completed, and the students are able to demonstrate a solid grasp of the technique, then the training process begins. But the key is not to begin drilling until the technique is perfected, at least to a level appropriate for age and grade.

In judo, training and drilling is usually achieved through repetitions in the form of *uchi-komi* and then *nage-komi*. The recommendation with *uchi-komi*, particularly with children, is to begin with fewer reps but expect and encourage good form. It has been observed that the more *uchi-komi* children are given, the sloppier the techniques become. In other words, the first three or four reps will look good, and then the next dozen are poor. So the result is that the student is repeating and

reinforcing a poor technique. It is better to do fewer repetitions but to try and do them perfectly. In this manner the correct form and neuro-muscular conditioning are being reinforced.

Once static *uchi-komi* and *nage-komi* have been mastered, the students can move on to doing the newly learned technique on the move. Again, the instructor is encouraging **quality** over quantity. As the old saying goes, "It is not practice that makes perfect; it is perfect practice that makes perfect."

This brings us back to the teaching-learning process. Good practice begins with effective age-appropriate teaching, delivered in reasonable chunks, by dedicated and competent teachers.