

Introduction To Taekwondo

Taekwondo, one of the most popular martial arts and sports in the world, is a Korean martial art which emphasizes kicking. However, that's the textbook definition. Taekwondo is a lot more.

To some, it is a traditional martial art, rooted in [Korean history](#) and Buddhist philosophy. To some, it is an international sport, a part of the Olympic Games. To some, it is a fitness and [self-defense](#) program that tests both physical and mental abilities.

The word Taekwondo is derived from these Korean words:

| | | | |
|---|---|------|--------------------------------------|
| 跆 | 태 | TAE | means "Foot", "Leg", or "to step on" |
| 拳 | 권 | KWON | means "Fist" or "Fight" |
| 道 | 도 | DO | means "Way" or "Discipline" |

As the definition indicates, Taekwondo focuses on kicking rather than punching or grappling, although those (plus pressure points) are touched upon as students study self-defense.

Although Taekwondo is several centuries old, the sport (that is, the sort of sparring you may see in the Olympics) has been developed considerably since the 1950s. If you watch world-class competitors, you may be dazzled by high-flying, powerful kicks and acrobatics as the athletes – wearing [lightweight, highly protective armor](#) – attempt to score points rather than knockouts. Even at lower levels, competitors, while perhaps not as showy, test their skills against one another. [Tournaments](#) encompassing all skill levels and ages are held regularly in venues throughout the world.

Sparring is only a part of Taekwondo. The [forms](#) – movement patterns that increase in complexity – teach the student balance, self-defense strikes, blocks and kicks, while also training and disciplining the mental processes.