



## Improvised Weapons (Silver Bullets)

Believe it or not, you're better off hitting someone with your hands than most of the 'improvised weapons' out there.

Ripping lumps out of someone with a key isn't actually as effective as a good solid bang in the head - it's messy undoubtedly but definitely not a high-percentage 'stop'. It's true that you can turn anything into a weapon, but it's usually not much of a weapon if you look at it objectively!

Unless it gives a distinct advantage, such as increased 'stopping' power (not just wounding - this is a big difference), increased range (not something that will exist for long anyway) and/or durability it generally falls into the 'gimmick' category in my book.

I personally dislike 'gimmicks' and 'tricks' that are pushed out as real solutions, attacking the eyes with the thumbs is as effective, more in fact, than going mad with a key - especially for women.

Personally I teach everything from empty hands, to impact and bladed weapons, all the way to the tactical use of personal firearms, and I have taught the use of improvised and concealed weapons extensively, including to specialist military units from various countries, not to mention having used virtually every conceivable object as a weapon throughout various live encounters - the point I'm making here is that some things are effective, and that some things are gimmicks that don't perform as well for real as they do in training - often they may look 'nasty' but can be a hindrance in actual usage.

A lot of this stuff looks more effective than it really is, and there is always the thought of the slashing etc scaring people to the point where they back off - problem is, that's an awfully big positive assumption to make, I've used all manner of 'tools' for real and it's not as simple as that - more often than not it drives the aggressor into a panic/frenzy and amidst all the red mess I've had to revert back to 'Speed Dial #1' and just bang a big dose of sleep into them!

Generally there are 3 certain ways of stopping a human:

1. Kill them - actually very difficult, regardless of what movies you've seen, plus outside of the moral reach for most.
2. Incapacitate via Trauma - causing so much injury that the person is physically incapable of doing anything offensive, including pulling a trigger. Very difficult and distasteful for most - would be a very messy aerobic workout with a key or pen implement.



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3. Incapacitate via Knock Out - actually the easiest and most accessible of all the above. Can't be done effectively by any means other than direct impact to the head/neck area, or some form of strangle/choke. Puncture/slash wounds won't have this effect unless the victim loses so much blood as to become unconscious.

A lighter and weaker person, male or female, can render a man unconscious using impact - during the late 80's I was teaching women almost exclusively as an advisor for a division of the Metropolitan Police and used to subject them to padded assailant drills using some of the first FIST gear in the UK, we had numerous big tough padded assailants knocked clean out by some tiny girls who just got stuck in with basic repeated strikes and a truckload of attitude. I did cover improvised sharp weapons on that course also, but mainly as anti-grappling tools, and other items as impact enhancers, but always chosen so long as they fitted the criteria set out above - otherwise it was the Mk1 hand that did most of the work.

In the vast majority of cases a simple bare hand blow, not even from an especially heavy or powerful person, will produce more stopping power, and this stopping power is increased using repeated blows to the same target.

The crucial thing is that most items such as keys and pens will cause a superficial wound only. It's a malicious thing, that's all. This stuff isn't training theory to me, I assure you. Forget Hollywood stuff when it comes to 'fashionable' improvised weapons. It's fiction!

The amazing 'access' sequences of grabbing some 'innocuous' item and employing sometimes elaborate blows are most often ridiculous if you stop to think "Could I have just piled in barehanded instead?" - as the answer is generally "Yes" and you'd be landing credible shots long before you would have some half-cooked 'weapon' in your hand!

My advice is to only consider using something as a weapon if it affords a real and distinct advantage concerning reach, durability and/or stopping power. If it doesn't it is possibly a foolish stunt that will probably prolong a situation and make it worse.

I'm not talking mere cynicism here - you name it and I've more than likely had a real go with it! I taught the use of such items to an 'interesting' group once upon a time, and it quickly became apparent with research, practice and actual use 'operationally' what worked, better than a bare hand, and what didn't. Whole lessons spent practising against actual meat targets, not milk cartons and cardboard sheets, using a variety of drinking glasses, keys, pens - everything possible that can pierce or tear flesh - and the results were disappointing, as were the operational attempts at the same when compared with far simpler means of being unpleasant!

Making lots of little holes in someone with a pen or a key looks fabulously deadly in a movie, but is a different reality when done for real - it's messy and might dissuade a half-



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hearted attacker (wish I had more of that type!) but a decent right hand, or two or three, will end the encounter. It's as simple as that.

If getting shot and stabbed with real purpose-built weapons, several times, won't stop committed attackers, what is your biro, key, mobile phone or 'tactical' (i.e. is black and has a clip!) torch going to do? Get real for goodness sake! As I've stated so many times already, wounding isn't enough - it's 'stopping' that needs to be done, and surprisingly enough this can be done often more easily with an empty hand. The blunt empty hand causes head 'displacement' and shakes the brain - whereas a sharp pointy object causes penetration, but little head movement. Jagged slashes across a face may cause someone to back off, but they have next to no 'stopping' power - so they may do the exact opposite - you wouldn't stop me with a facial wound, or any number of guys that I know, you'd just start me properly.

Sharp pointy things like pens are great for breaking a grappling hold - sometimes! They rely on pain, which is a wholly subjective animal. They can be used to extract passively resisting people from vehicles, and can be used to 'persuade' the truth out of a person for sure, but if you want to have a real fight with a credit card, pen or key, then get ready to be VERY surprised. Sticking a pen, pencil or key, in any fashion, into someone's neck is far less efficient than a good bang on the jaw when trying to incapacitate someone, or stun them so you can get away. You're talking about wounding; not stopping, someone like this - and that won't be enough.

Are you trying to end the attack through making the guy bleed to death? I hope you're a patient man! What effect will it have upon the guy? Do you think that some crazy will just stop and either roll over or run away when you stab him in the neck with your pen or key? It's very likely that you'll make the situation a whole lot worse for yourself, when you could have ended it early.

Sure you can puncture a major blood vessel, with enough holes to cause a massive bleed-out, but this is the only way it's going to be effective - talking of movies this would be the 'Casino' method - are you really prepared to do that, or do you just tell yourself that you could, at the time? Don't take killing a man for granted.

Ask yourself, could that situation have been resolved with simple blows to the jaw or side/back of the head, for example? Of course it could, but they needed to establish the character's viciousness, so something extreme was used.

Using a pen mid-fight? We're talking 'Bourne Identity' I suppose - fabulous fight-scene I agree, very nasty, but the pen was ineffective - even in the scene, it was done for the 'ooh/aah' effect!



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Stop looking for the same attention-grabbers that Hollywood looks for - they're trying to give the audience something new and exciting, whereas you can more than make do with a plain-old punch or elbow to the jaw!

Think 'stopping power' every time. When you consider the use of any small item as an improvised weapon apply these tests:

1. Can it produce instant incapacitation like a basic punch-type technique?
2. Can it be instantly accessed like a basic punch-type technique?
3. Will it withstand repeated use like a basic punch-type technique?

If you get just one 'No' then just stick to the punch - or is that too boring, and too simple? Obviously insert 'elbow' or 'slap' or 'hammerfist' as required, but the overall concept is the same - avoid the Hollywood 'variety' approach and the desire to make more of a simple solution than is necessary.

If you can 'pick something up and hit someone', then fine - but you could have just 'hit someone' - even the sentence is shorter and easier to say! Do you get the point? Anything held in the hand limits the hand - so it had better be worth it! Don't rely on gimmicks over solid dependable 'always available' methods. The crucial factor when it comes to using any weapon, improvised or not, is access - it has to be ready to use when needed, and this is often spontaneously - if we are using good threat management practices progressive input gives options for avoidance, over and above the preparation of weapons.

Small hard heavy objects that increase impact by virtue of weight and/or striking surface are real and valuable improvised weapons - such as rocks, pool balls, steam irons etc. What real damage is a mobile phone going to do? Less than a punch without it is the real answer. Just a note on using a mobile phone here - most of the units currently available don't improve upon the Mk1 hand at all - in terms of weight or durability - and tactically it is a VERY bad idea to destroy a means of communication in such an emergency!

The best use for handheld objects that have no combative stopping power is that of 'Distraction' - throw the item at the face and follow-up with good solid explosive shots to the primary targets. Either 'casually' flick/toss the thing and pile in, or full-on 'launch' the object for maximum 'flinch' distraction, spontaneously engaging the visual cortex, then unload with all you've got.

This way, everything CAN actually become a weapon, but of DISTRACTION. Even a screwed up piece of paper, food/drink, a wallet, a coat - something you might actually have in your hand at the time!



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I realise that what I'm outlining above might be controversial - to some, but those of you that have 'been there' and not just 'researched' or 'practised' it, know the truth of the matter.

I most definitely don't discount the use of certain items as weapons - a heavy ashtray definitely fits my criteria of an object that lends weight and decent striking surface - and it used to be one of my weapons of choice in a bar situation - however it has to be said that they can disintegrate under repeated heavy use and I have the marks on my hand to prove it!

I don't completely discount the use of the pen either - again it used to be one of the main tools I taught to a certain group of professionals once upon a time, and I have used it on several occasions. Read above and you will see that I wholeheartedly agree that repeated blows to the neck will cause potentially fatal blows - but then ask yourself how many people would be prepared to do that?

As for screwdrivers and suchlike, I don't even class these as 'improvised' weapons - they are the real thing!

I disagree in some ways with the notion of psychological advantage - in that I believe any 'perceived' advantage can be dangerous, if it is merely psychological, and not physical. Not discounting the psychological aspects of combat obviously, without will there is no chance, but ultimately the immediate problem is fairly physical after all!

I am brutally honest when I teach, and when I learn, I want a 'real' advantage, not just a 'psychological' one. Just because you or I can perform in the extreme, doesn't enable everyone else to. Like I have stated earlier, I believe many people ignore the gravity of certain issues - to a point that believing that they can blind and maim, and kill, is taken for granted.

Practising a thousand ways to maim and disfigure a man whilst 'tooled up' can often lead people down the wrong path, and such acts are often taken far too lightly in my opinion, if a person is going to balk at the notion of punching someone in the face as hard as is physically possible - and more than you imagine do - then what chance do you stand ripping a hole in a face? Most people will say, "but if I had to I could" and they'd be making a great big fat assumption, a positive one that isn't qualified and could fail badly - unless they have already done it.

Learning 'offensive knife' and suchlike from instructors who have never had a knife in hand whilst facing another man can be a touch 'off' as far as I'm concerned, it's theory plain and simple - learn new weapon handling methods and improved ways to cut and stab if this really interests you, but learning to butcher another person for real? If you



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really need to know how to do this, learn from someone who has, and see how it doesn't resemble what the theorists recommend - as usual!

I would rather focus on solid dependable skills, that I know will be employed when needed, rather than something so extreme that it will require a superhuman act of resolve to execute - maybe. We play the hand we are dealt in life, it is better to realise limitations and seek ways to avoid, than to fool ourselves into a false sense of security, with perceived abilities.

I have seen people fight on with the most horrific wounds and still pose a very real threat - and in the line of work that I choose I will most probably see so again. Stab wounds are often perceived as punches, and only take effect when shock sets in, so this in itself proves that wounding is not instantly incapacitating. Often stab, and gunshot, victims do not realise they have been wounded until after the incident - sometimes even being alerted to the fact by a third party. And they might have even 'won' the encounter!

What I do know, for a fact, is that an unconscious man poses zero threat, compared to a severely-wounded man who might go either way; curl up in a ball or make a frenzied last-ditch assault.

But my main reason for the cynical approach to the current fashion of 'improvised weapons' - which you must concede can start to get a little ridiculous, is to encourage people to stop looking at 'gimmicks' to give a quick fix - and leave that to the 'ninja/special agent' subculture types (apologies to any real ninjas/special agents out there!).

This is my major gripe against this subject in particular and the way the 'RBSD' movement can sometimes make a 'magic wand' out of it, when they should be doing good solid and functional training first, and second, and third.

I will always steer people interested in REAL self-protection away from such things and concentrate instead on the core skills, initially at least. If you are some covert-operative - fine, one day you might want to drive a stainless-steel pen into someone's subclavial region, or a gangland enforcer might elect to 'stripe' a rival with a credit card as punishment, or maybe you want to 'plunge' another convict on the landing with a sharpened heat-hardened toothbrush handle - but I guarantee a simple, boring, punch on the jaw, or two or three, with plenty of practice will serve you better, no matter who you are, whatever gender or what you weigh in at.

All these opinions on the utilisation of certain improvised weapons must be taken in context - where limitations are considered before capabilities, so there are no nasty surprises when it 'doesn't do what it says on the box' when the chips are down and the



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stakes are high! Always pick fact over fiction, and function over form when it comes to real combat - reverse this when making a movie or nobody will watch it!

In conclusion, weapons training can always be a 'crowd pleaser', and everyone wants the ability of being able to effectively defend themselves and their loved ones, especially when some disparity of capability is present - the problem lies with investing too much credibility in a perceived solution such as the ability to utilise any common object as an effective weapon of opportunity. A great deal of commonly held beliefs and practices simply do not hold up in actual use but are propagated by the uninformed that simply 'want' them to work, and this can create a completely false sense of combative capability which in turn can actually compromise personal security measures if relied upon.

My closing advice is to consider, very objectively, what will actually occur if you use an improvised weapon such as a key. Consider what the actual result will be, and what actual effect is probable - not possible - if it is used against a determined aggressive adult male, intent on really hurting you. Don't think of these things in personal subjective terms - this doesn't count. Then consider how easily such an item could be deployed, and finally would you be able to inflict at least as much stopping - not wounding - power faster and more effectively without the 'weapon'?

Save the silver bullets for werewolves,  
**Mick**