

KOF 2002 – Shura’s Ultimate Faq

With this I intend to give an easy but detailed approach to the kof2002 game system to give you an understanding of how it’s played at a higher level. In addition I want to go deep into some stuff that is not so clear to everyone concerning fighting games in general e.g. frames and their use. Keep in mind that I will not write a lot dictating what you have to do frame by frame, rather I want to give you some gameplay ideas and detailed information on how kof2002’s engine works so you can develop your own play style to improve your game and combo execution.

Also I always prefer to give more than one point of view so you can judge each aspect of the feature and find what suits your style or situation.

Let’s start.

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FAQ NOTATION

UB - up back

U - up

UF – up forward

BCK – back

N – neutral position

FWD – forward

DB – down back

DF – down forward

A – weak punch

B – weak kick

C – strong punch

D – strong kick

QCF – quarter circle forward

QCB – quarter circle back

HCF – half circle forward

HCB – half circle back

CR – crouching

ST – standing

CL – close

J – jumping

1) Frames

A frame is the unit of time used in videogames. Modern games run at 60fps (frames per second) so one frame is exactly 1/60 of a second. Characters movements and attacks are animated by frames.

Each normal, special or DM's attack animations can be split into three portions:

1. Startup: is the time before a move reaches the Active frame status.
2. Active frames: are the ones that allow the move to hit (there can be more than one).
3. Recovery: is the amount of frames before your character reaches neutral status again. Also, once a move hits, the rest of the Active frames are added to the Recovery frames.

An example of frame data is:

Leona's CD: 18 / 2 / 27

This tells us that Leona uses 18 frames before reaching the first active one, her stance can hit for 2 frames, then once the active frames are gone she takes 27 frames to go back to neutral stance.

If she hit CD on the first of the 2 active frames the other one is added to recovery, so she reaches neutral stance in a total of 28 frames.

If she whiffed CD completely she needs 47 frames to go back to neutral stance.

Studying frame charts can help in finding links, combos and developing various Pressing strategies.

Obviously don't go mad with the frame data, most of these things concerning King of Fighters can be easily seen. But with regards to retaliation or combos, frame data knowledge is very useful due to some unfriendly animation.

Beware while dealing with frame data and charts. Players sometimes are dumb and they don't think out of the schemes. I've seen some discussions where they say that a move has to be avoided due to it having only a -1 frame disadvantage.

This is retarded as the bait concept can heavily rely on some frame disadvantage or openings. Unless it is clear that a move can punish a pressing string you can still bait the reaction you want. Clark's close C (1 hit) fwdB has some frame disadvantage and doesn't seem to lead to any clear goal. Wrong! fwdB's pushback allows Clark to reach a safe distance where he can still lead the game, for example: his sweep covers a nice range, his standing A is a great hop preventer and his air attacks can deal with everything. He can also buffer his grab DM (hcb, run hcb A/C) and put the opponent in a bad situation. So remember before avoiding a move at all to be careful and try to exploit every possible outcome depending on the situation.

Matchup analysis is a deep thing - a move can be useful against Athena or have to be avoided completely against O.Shermie. It can be useful for one situation and not for another.

i.) Hit confirm

Hit confirm is the art of seeing if a blow strikes, then cancel on decision to maximize the damage or to keep an advantage.

This relies heavily upon frame concepts and blow or move properties as well as hitstun properties.

This is used in some situations to get the best possible outcome from the situation in terms of damage or pressing.

Generally, a hit confirmable attack can have short recovery frames. If you can cancel an attack late it means that it has a lot of active frames and few recovery ones, so after the active one you can wait a little more to cancel because you still have cancelable frames.

Another thing that comes in useful is the startup speed of the move to be hit confirmed.

Hit confirm doesn't mean that you have minutes to make a decision, but just some fractions of seconds as you can see in the below example:

Joe's crouching A can be easily hit confirmed into;

qcf, hcbA/C or qcf*2A DM.

The low punch has (3,4,4) as frame data while the startup speed of both DMs is 1 frame and their range is quite far too. Since the hitstun lasts more than the whole crA recovery and the startup of the DM is almost immediate you have some time to decide to cancel or not. Some quick maths and you know you have 7 frames if you hit within the first active one plus the remaining frames of the hitstun to make your decision.

In kof 2k2 there are some additions that make a hit confirm decision easier, so it isn't all about frame knowledge and high execution speed. I want to also say that hit confirm terms in kof 2k2 are not so strict as it can be for another fighting game. Command attacks are a great help to make a decision since they take a lot of time that allow you to think.

Let's pick Iori as example:

Close C into qcf, hcbA/C
Close C fwdA into qcf, hcbA/C

With the only close C hit it can be harder to hit confirm into the DM but if you put it in between the fwdA, you have two whole hits and so a lot of frames and in effect time to decide whether or not to cancel into a DM. So, the general rule here is to always use your moveset to your advantage. When you have long ranged and chainable commands always throw them in to help your timing.

Obviously these concepts refer to some unclear openings or retaliations, when you have a clear chance to land a combo you don't need to think hard about it, just go for it.

Beware also of unsafe strings. Sometimes it's better not to land on an opponent who is guarding the entire chain. You have to check to see if you're hitting, dealing damage, or becoming prey to any retaliation as discussed below.

ii.) Retaliations

To retaliate is another deep concept that can involve frames.

Basically, it means that you have to exploit a flaw to your own advantage to land damage or to gain an advantageous position.

The easiest example that comes in mind is when your opponent rushes an anti-air such as Iori's dpC.

Ok, the example is too basic, but you can now see that due to the dp's animation you have a big opportunity to land free damage.

If you leave some openings, via pressing strings or combos (with the help of the frame data) you can bait your opponent to react stupidly from which you can capitalise.

In the previous chapter I've already discussed what is a frame disadvantage, and I've said that if your opponent can move and so attack before you, you'll probably be in trouble.

A safe move can be intended in two ways, with some frame advantage or matchup depending, because not each character has chances to punish the same string. This goes back to what I said before, "a move can be useful against Athena but has to be completely avoided against O.Shermie".

With experience you'll find out by yourself how and when to retaliate.

Obviously you have to check your move properties such as startup speed or recovery.

Range and hitboxes also play a big role here. You can have the fastest startup move, but if you lack range and hitbox size, you can miss and become prey yourself to any retaliation.

Also pokes can be useful to find openings. Generally their startup speed is little, 3~4 frames and a nice range are enough to hit over some recovering moves.

- Gaps

If you look at some expert matches you notice that they don't play gimmicks with b&b all the time, they prefer pokes and safe from distance moves aiming for blockstun and mixup while their match can look boring or too basic.

This is also due to the existence of some gaps within some b&b that sometimes can cost you a whole round or the loss of an advantageous position.

Two examples are:

Terry's close C (2 hit) qcbA – gap in the qcbA startup

O.Chris's close C fwdA qcfA – gap in the qcfA startup

This happens because a slow startup or far ranged attack can make you leave blockstun, thus being able to move again.

In O.Chris's case you can roll in between and punish directly, in Terry's a startup invincible move can do the job.

I'll forever remember that you have to know both yours and your opponent's move properties, invincibility kind and range.

Special's or DM's may have slight differences between versions such as low or high startup invincibility, more or less range and quick or slow startup. You have to choose the best solution depending on the situation.

Long command moves can also have gaps - they can be exploited using a stock to AB counter roll and recover before the opponent. Mai's dfB or Blue Mary's fwd/bckB are vulnerable to this.

My only advice here is to avoid those gaps like Hell and not b&b unless your opponent doesn't have a chance to AB counter to escape.

When faced with an opponent who b&b's you all the time like a robot, use back or forward AB roll and retaliate.

iii.) Hitboxes

Character's sprites (and so animations) change while they move around.

A character's hitbox in neutral stance, standing, crouching or jumping, can be approximated to their whole body.

It also depends upon their height or size, so tall and fat are better targets (Chang, Yamazaki, Yashiro) while small and thin (Kula, Chin, Choi) are a little difficult to hit.

It also changes if they get hit, run, duck, slide or attack.

An interesting point in hitbox analysis is to know the reach or a vulnerable spot of a move or know exactly where a property is placed.

Kof2002 has almost precise hitboxes, so generally they follow the whole animation with no particular problems with recognizing them.

That 'almost' I used before means that an animation can be unclear, so the hitbox isn't too smooth, and you can hit when you don't expect. This happens to most retaliations.

Know how your hitboxes change, and compare it with the opponent's.

With some low attacks you can go under some standing or jumping attacks and so retaliate, some attacks allow you to jump and hit over sweeps or lows, others can bait empty guard CDs making the opponent waste stocks.

iv.) Dark change

In kof, when you unleash any of your DM/SDM/HSDM, the game enters 'dark change' and the background turns black.

Dark change lasts 28 frames and its use is as part of the startup frame set of your move, mainly for animation purpose.

Within those frames both characters are stuck.

In frame data you can see:

Iori's Maiden Masher (qcf, hcbA/C):

({1 + 28 [dark change] + 5} [full body M], 4+12, 42)

The whole duration is 92 frames, but dark change is only used for the startup animation. Iori doesn't have any advantage during that period while the opponent can't move, so the real duration of the Maiden Masher is 64 frames.

During dark change, buffers still work (see next chapter).

In those 28 frames you can input normally, once you can move again your inputs can become special moves.

This is useful because if your opponent needed some frames to reach a close distance to hit, for example, a startup invincible move, a grab or simply holding back may save your lifebar.

Beware about grabs - they hit before dark change. Once you're caught 28 frames are only used for some animation.

An interesting thing to watch out for is the fact that dark change can temporally stop any of your attacks.

Let's assume that you start a special move that lasts 19 frames.

When your character reaches the third frame and the opponent does a DM/SDM/HSDM that has as startup 2+28 [dark change].

Your animation advances for another 2, then stops to dark change. After 28 frames your animation continues its flow for the remaining 14 and if your opponent's attack have higher priority then you'll be hit.

One of the most practical uses of the dark change is to make a DM release faster.

Some, like Kyo's Orochinagi, can be held for a certain amount of time. If you release it after the end of dark change it will reach active status faster than normal. Obviously you gain some advantage over normal frame flow if you release it on the first available frame after dark change.

2) Game engine

Chapter A – tricks

i.) Input priority

Neo Geo games have a feature where when you hit more than one button at the same time:

$$A > B > C > D$$

So priorities are consecutive - A has the highest & D the lowest.

If there are no features with multiple presses, the one that has the highest priority will come out.

In kof2002, if you hit AC, AD or BD, respectively A, A and B will come out. This won't work for AB, BC and CD, due to AB roll, BC mode and CD attacks.

Also, if you are involving directions (commands for example), the one with the highest priority button will come out.

Let's assume that you have commands both for fwdA and fwdB. If you input fwdAB, a fwdA will always come out.

If you have only a fwdB command and you press fwdABCD the fwdB will still come out.

This doesn't apply to AB, BC and CD.

If you hit ABC an A will come out, not an AB.

This comes in handy when you have to buffer inputs for some combos. We'll discuss everything in the appropriate chapter.

ii.) Buffers

Buffer is a nice feature introduced in fighting games that helps you perform some combos or motions that would require insanely fast hand speed, making the use of the combos (the fun part of a game) frustrating.

Buffering works with the engine storing a motion for a certain amount of time, even if it is interrupted by something like an attack or a run. This feature is commonly used to shortcut combos.

The easiest example of this is to perform a low combo into a qcf*2 type DM, so it will be:

crB crA qcf*2 A/B/C/D

But for inputs like A or B that give little hitstun, any double quarter circle motion input can be nasty (not impossible btw). The buffer system comes to help here, just do:

crB qcf crA qcf A/B/C/D

Just watch out for the crA to link to crB and the job is done.

In kof 2k2 there are a lot of examples and more advanced stuff, just use your imagination in combo making. Remember that performing motions that involve one or more motions or directions then the system will buffer even those.

Benimaru can:

crB crB qcfB d,uB (1 hit) supercancel to qcb*2 B/D

Combos like this can be done without any shortcut, but why waste time frustrating your fingers to reach insane speed when you can do things easily? So:

crB crB qcfB then do a half circle starting from down position passing through back and finishing up B then finally qcb B.

Doing the half circle motion will store the first qcb needed for the DM and the d,u inputs required to do the Handou Sandan Geri, so once you reach the super cancellable hit, just input the last qcb B for this combo to work.

Within the same input you can buffer both dp and qcf motions.

Kula can supercancel her dpC(1 hit) into qcf*2A/C DM Buffering it like fwd qcfC, qcfA/C

Notice that the buffer 'prefers' the dp over the qcf motion.

Be creative and discover what things can be achieved.

Some quick examples:

Clark: hcb fwdC (1 hit) hcb A

Takuma: crB crB qcfB hcbA

In the Kula example above, due to buffer, the fwd direction is considered to make the dp come out instead of the qcf motion for the ice breath fireball.

Sometime you can get caught into making execution mistakes.

It can often happen that a hcf move after a run will result in a dp.

Fwd fwd (hold) hcfA/B/C/D

The buffer system can remember only:

Fwd fwd qcfA/B/C/D

Back, downback and down are ignored. When you have to deal with this kind of input, it's a good idea to put in a neutral so that you don't accidentally buffer another move.

Therefore the above example will be:

Fwd fwd N hcfA/B/C/D

This is easy because when you leave the stick in neutral stance after a run, there are some frames before the character stops. You have enough time to leave it in neutral and buffer.

This can also happen after a command move since most of their inputs are forward or back.

Vanessa's close D (2 hits) fwdA hcfA, can become

close D (2 hits) fwdA dpA easily.

Here it's a little more difficult since you have a smaller window to leave stick in neutral stance then input the hcf motion within cancellable frames to combo.

You can also input the hcfA slowly to make the buffer forget about the fwdA, but that depends on how good your execution skills are otherwise you are more inclined to make mistakes.

As a general rule, remember to input sequences in the 'cleanest' way possible, practicing and trying to find where you're committing mistakes and why the game engine is answering with that particular move instead of another.

Let's discuss further now 'button priority'. I said that the NeoGeo priority feature can help in executing some combos. The easiest examples are:

Joe: close C dfB Bakuretsu Ken (A/C rapidly)

Chang: crA Tekkyuu Dai Kaiten (A/C rapidly)

For Joe's you have to input close C dfABC then mash A/C twice for the Bakuretsuken to come out.

Chang's is done simply with crAC A/C twice.

This works thanks to both buffering and the button priority system. Joe doesn't have command moves with dfA or dfC, so since fwdB has the highest priority it will come out while the buffer system 'remembers' that you have hit A and C. Therefore pressing them twice again results in the Bakuretsuken to come out.

Chang has inputs for both crA and crC, but since crA has the highest priority it will come out. C is stored for the Dai Kaiten.

There are a lot of advanced or poorly used applications for this, practice mode is there for a reason. Use it.

iii.) **Hold the key**

It's really difficult to explain some combos without examples, but they give you an idea.

Have you ever seen a Chris player execute crB crA fwdA into any finisher with ease?

And an Iori player that seems to be amazing with crB crA fwdA Maiden Masher combos?

And you tried to do it in practice mode without any success or strange results instead of your super cool combo?

This involves 2 concepts, the first one discussed before (buffering) and a newer one I call the 'hold the key' bug/glitch.

History tells us that this bug/glitch is in kof since 94, but not so helpful in versus as it become in post kof 96 games.

The bug works this way - keeping held any button (A B C D) and doing a motion will prevent any special move coming out but will buffer every input.

The only thing that can come out is a normal attack or a command move.

This is the Iori example:

Hold any button, crB crA qcfA, then release the held button and then hcb A for the Maiden Masher

This is your amazing combo!

Holding a button will prevent the system from releasing the fireball that would normally come out with the qcfA. Instead it stores the qcf needed to do the maiden masher. As a result only a fwdA will come out. Once you

release the held button it will remove the bug so that the last hcb A will result in a Maiden Masher thanks to buffer!

Holding a random button can be a pain for some combos, here you have to practice by yourself finding the one that suits your situation. The general rule is to keep held down the combo starter button, so for Iori's it'll be B after cr.B:

crB (hold B) crA qcfA (release B) hcbA

The tricky part is to release B in time before the last A input. Practice here is your only solution.

Some easy examples:

Chris/O Chris: crB (hold B) crA fwdA (release B) finisher

Iori: close C (hold C) qcfA (release C) hcb A/C

K': crouch/close C (hold C) qcf A (release C) hcb A/C

Clark: jA (hold A) hcb C (one hit and release A) hcb A/C

Without holding B, a fwdA after a cr.A will result 99% of the time in a qcfA move. This is due to the buffer system.

Although you can be quick and precise and still perform combos without any error, but why if you have assistance?

Also, hold the key couples perfectly with the buffer system as you can see in each combo shown above.

Holding a button also allows another glitch such as those 6-7 pokes that then cancel into a combo. The most infamous is Angel's 13+ B hits and combo. Others can do a nice amount of hits against a backturned opponent. This glitch allows you to link more pokes than you normally would. In normal situations you can notice that you can add one or two. You can add even more if additional modifiers such as counter, crouching, backturned or a recovering opponent, are involved.

2) Game engine

Chapter B – features

i.) Crossup

Crossup is the art of hitting your opponent in a certain way where their character is stuck in normal guard position while you hit them in the back from the air.

This is a cool aspect in fighting games so no one can just guard all the time becoming invincible.

It works in an easy way - you have to choose the air to ground attack for your character 'that can crossup'.

More clearly, your jumping attack's hitbox has to be so big and directed towards your opponent when you're jumping over them.

Some characters have a stronger crossup than others which means that the strongest ones have a larger hitbox (so not needing very precise positioning, while a weak one could require exact timing and a certain opponent position).

Crossup chances change if you jump low or high, hyper or not, it all depends on your character's features.

As a general rule, a crossup should be attempted if you have the chance to land on the opposite side of the guard direction of your opponent.

Just imagine an enemy character in guard stance. Now draw a vertical line that goes from the floor to the ceiling - a successful crossup attempt will make your hitbox land just a few pixels away from that line on the opposite guard side.

The distance from that imaginary line can change depending on your character's crossup effectiveness that is commonly intended as the specific hitbox for that attack.

This should give you the basic idea and the rest is all up to you & your experience.

A strange issue with crossups that I've noticed in my experience is that sometimes a crossup can hit you on the back but the opponent's character still lands in front of you with obvious chances to land damage.

I don't know if there is a specific setup to do this middle screen with 100% success, but I want you to know that it can happen, especially when the targeted character is in a strange position such as a recovering from any hitstun or during wakeup.

There are some modifiers that can raise crossup chances because of the change in hitbox position or size.

Crouch stance is an example - the hitbox slightly moves to a more friendly position so that each character can become a better target.

Hitstun recovery also does the job due to the character's animation being pushed back.

I'm sure you have noticed that Whip or Chris players love to exploit this.

ii.) Backturn

Once the opponent gives their back to your combos, you can add other hits for additional damage due to their hitstun animation and so hitbox being directed towards your blows instead of the other way.

The number of hits you can add is related to how deep you hit your opponent and your move's pushback.

Backturn can be a consequence of a crossup or can occur from an AB escape while your opponent is still whiffing a move.

A more difficult setup for a backturn can come from any mistimed AB roll that ends 'into' your character.

The additional damage mostly comes from weak attacks since they have the lowest pushback, also in BC combos you can add hits with additional free cancels.

iii.) Corner reverse guard glitch

I want to cover another glitch that is heavily used during vs matches and adds to gameplay other mixup chances.

This is called 'the corner reverse guard glitch' and works every time a knocked down character faces the walls side during wakeup while cornered.

This works best if the knock down comes from a non rollable blow or grab, otherwise they can easily escape. This can work even when you successfully land a combo on the opponent's back (after a crossup or any AB escape for example) and end with a non rollable knockdown move. Just find the one that your character has and its possible setups.

Here's a brief list of examples:

Kim: C throw or qcbA ufB dwnB combo finisher from a crossup

Terry: D throw

Takuma: D throw or hcbD finisher from a crossup

The glitch works this way: first of all is needed an air to ground attack that has crossup properties, then a cornered opponent during wakeup after a non rollable knockdown.

This means that each input has to be done in reverse. So if you want to do a dp motion and try a counter you have to input like a rdp.

By the way, it's really risky to rush someone expecting this glitch as you have to check properties of your antiair. Some hitboxes don't save you but just give a counter for your opponent to land more damage.

During this reversed stance even guard is reversed. So if you want to save yourself from a jump attempt here you have to input the opposite direction, then once the opponent has landed just change back to normal guard direction.

Dealing with this glitch in some situations can be really nasty, if your guard animation or your character hitbox is somewhat strange giving a forward input to guard will make your opponent land on your back, reversing everything back to normal in a few frames hardly seen.

In addition, someone expecting your guard reversed can give your character enough time to wake up normally before inputting the jump attack.

But the worst fake to deal with is the usage of a non crossup air to ground, it's strange, but a non crossup attack will not reverse your guard.

The same issue will occur with a badly timed jump. If they jump too late (we're talking about few frames) this glitch won't activate.

There isn't a specific law that applies here but only knowledge and game experience will help.

You have to value every matchup and situation plus you need fast reflexes to recognize the attack your opponent is using to guard in the appropriate direction.

iv.) Attack properties

When I discuss about strategic approach to a match I always talk about to 'know your whole move set and attack properties and always find the best solution to reach the most advantageous outcome'.

This is because everything has to work in order to achieve victory in a match.

The strength of an expert player is also within their ability to find and apply the best solution to each situation and change their strategy depending on their opponent.

The most basic point to start with is to know and study your whole move set, knowing exactly where a move or chain can lead you to. Also, some move properties can allow you to limit an opponent's strategy/gameplan and so place them in a disadvantageous position or to force them to switch to another approach, the one you want to control and beat them with.

Each move or attack can have different properties and usually more than one.

- *high / low*

The most basic mixups involve overheads or lows, so the first property you can check for are these.

Having quick overheads and easy chainable lows means that you can always try a 50/50 mixup, aka high low mindgames.

Also check for standing attacks or commands that can hit low, while your opponent sees you standing near them, they may not focus so much about low attempts. Iori's, Kusanagi's and Yamazaki's close B have this feature, plus they're chainable to other attacks or cancellable into specials. This surely raises their comboability and so their potential damage that they can dish out.

When you have to deal with commands, check the difference between a standalone execution and how their properties change if chained from another attack. I'm referring mostly to overheads and commands that hit low.

Most of them lose their feature once chained but this isn't a general rule. Mai's dfB's first hit if chained won't lose its guard low only feature, so it can be used in pressing strings to force a low guard and so limit a chance to escape.

Vanessa's fwdA lose its overhead feature when chained but standalone is the fastest of the game.

- Recovery

You know that there is AB to safe fall from a knockdown. Basically, hitting AB reduces the amount of wakeup frames, so your character can stand up quickly ready to counterattack or to avoid being caught in a bad situation where the opponent has a lot of time to setup their next move.

Some moves, attacks or grabs instead make your opponent crash to the ground not allowing them to AB recovery. Know that the fastest stand ups in the game (Yuri and Ralf) take 12 frames, the slowest (Maxima) needs 34.

Strategy wise, you can alternate the usage of rollable moves or not, to change your wakeup game to setup your crossup attempt and to bait the reactions you want.

In the corner, non recovery moves allow your opponent to eat the corner reverse guard glitch (check the previous chapter).

- Empty cancels

This is another interesting feature that can lead to some nice tricks. Some basic attacks (far, close or crouching) when whiffed can still be cancelled into a command or a special/DM attack.

They're mostly used to fake an opponent and to bait some reaction then punish.

One of the strongest empty cancels is a sweep into an overhead. If done correctly it's really hard for your opponent to guess and react. Notice also that empty cancels won't allow command attacks to lose their feature as being cancelled from another attack.

Empty cancels also help to cover some openings or advantage loss. Some moves can be cancelled within recovery frames, Joe's sweep is an example but also Ralf can reduce his range with hcfB/D while whiffing CDs from distance, Vanessa can be a pain whiffing moves into teleports or sways and so on.

Be creative here and try to fake your opponent.

Note that when BC mode is active you can empty cancel from some non cancellable moves wasting 1/5 of the remaining free cancel time.

- Invincibility

I think this is one of the most useful and used feature in the game.

Some moves may have startup or whole invincibility which means that your character, while executing some moves, can't be hit.

Also, startup invincibility can be high or low, if you execute a low startup invincible move and your opponent hits you from the air you'll surely be beaten and vice versa.

The same move can have different invincibility between A/B or C/D version even if they have almost the same animation.

AB rolls are also startup invincible while they are vulnerable at the end of the animations.

Grabs are the only weak point to invincibility.

In frame data lists you can find:

[full body M], [upper body M], [low body M]

[M] says that you have invincibility frames and the note on the side tells which kind it is.

Full body means that you're completely invincible to any attack from the air or close. Upper body offers safety against close standing attacks while low body means that you're invulnerable to low attacks such as crouching Bs.

- auto guard

Auto guard is a feature that lets you defend against an attack while you're in the middle of performing a move. Auto guard can only be triggered during a series of frames, usually a few startup ones.

Once triggered, the auto guard eats each active frame from the move it's absorbing. Auto guard featured frames happens only in the case of multihit moves, if there are some recovery frames between each hit.

K9999's arm SDM, once auto guarded, doesn't allow for auto guard frames to advance so, if it triggers, it's completely absorbed. Also, if you try to absorb some multihits that have recovery frames between each one, your auto guard frames can pass and you still can be hit by that attack.

Obviously, once attacks are eaten by the auto guard, the move continues its animation and hits if they have active frames like Takuma's qcbA/C or Kyo's qcfA.

The most important thing to keep in mind is that while you're auto guarding you're still suffering block damage, so don't get guard crushed as it can happen frequently.

In frame data lists, auto guard is shown like:

(9 + 2[G], 2+6, 24)

This is frame data for Kyo's qcfA, [G] tell where the auto guard feature can be triggered, in the example it can be done within the last two startup frames.

Remember that the whole startup is still 11, if auto guard is not triggered the move still hits only on the 12th frame.

- reversal

Reversal moves are specials that have the ability to catch your opponent's attack and respond with one of your own.

Basically, they have some frames between startup and recovery where if they catch a blow the reversal feature is triggered.

Most of them are attack dependant so a reversal may not catch what another can.

Blue Mary can catch different attacks with qcb B or D reversal, Yamazaki and Chang have an universal one where the only noticeable change between strong or weak versions is the exposure timing and the recovery, but both are vulnerable to lows. Kusanagi can catch both middle and low attacks, but can't do anything against air to ground unless it hits as a standalone special move during its proper active frames.

Most of them can be grab countered, but beware because some won't allow the command grab activation (Billy's max2, Kusanagi's qcbA/C) so you're going to hit with a close attack feeding the reversal. There are also projectile nullifiers or reflectors that work only against fireballs and can be considered as reversals.

Some of these can be an attack in itself, such as Kusanagi's qcb A/C or Yamazaki's qcf A/C. They have a startup time where some frames have the reversal property, a set of active ones to make the move act like a standalone attack and some recovery ones. Remember that once the reversal is triggered, the end animation can be different having different frame data and outcome.

Other moves have to be manually cancelled into an attack to counter. This is the case with Ryo's parry, fwdB and dfB.

- counter

The counter feature is a modifier, once it happens it allows you to continue attacking while your opponent suffers more damage than they normally would and a possible change in hitbox position and size.

This can happen once a character is hit during the active frames of an attack, special or not.

This is often used in combination with air CDs during air or air to ground battles, once the counter appears on your side, your opponent suffers more damage than normal and enters a vulnerable to juggles state again so you can continue attacking with another air attack or link any special move.

This allows you to decide to go for any mixup and bait or damage. When your following hit is a normal attack, jumping or not, your opponent will land on their feet open for mixups. If you decide to go for a special move or a DM you'll land damage only.

Check each character's possibilities and choose what is best for you in that precise matchup or situation. Sometimes it's a good decision to air CD again to quickly reach the corner and try some traps, if you have strong mixups or if you want your opponent to rush something to retaliate go for a normal or jumping, if you want easy damage juggle with any DM or special.

Counter wire is a feature added to some move's active frames while they hit as counter.

Not each character can do this but there are a nice amount of usable ones. If you manage to trigger this feature you'll see the counter by your side and an opponent being bounced to the wall and then falling mid screen leaving them open to any juggle.

- Juggle anywhere and OTG

Some moves can juggle opponents no matter what, even if they're hit from a CD that usually won't allow following hits.

After some attacks, the opponent's character while falling or crashing to the ground can enter an invincible state until they stand up again.

Those moves act like there is a 'counter' feature involved.

In kof2002 there are very few if compared to successive chapters (kofXI's gameplay heavily rely over them).

Whip's second qcfA's hit is an example. If you manage to hit a jumping opponent with a standing CD you can cancel it into the boomerang shot and see that the second hit will combo.

OTG is the acronym for 'off the ground' and it's a feature that allows a move to hit when the opponent is laying on the ground. There are only a few and not very practical.

Vanessa's and K9999's HSDM have this feature - knock an opponent down and you can easily follow with damage.

Obviously if you use a non recovery rollable move, your chances and timing to land an OTG increase.

2) Game engine

Chapter C - Grabs & throws

i.) Overview

Grabs and throws can be divided into 2 main categories:

- Command
- Special and DM

Command throws are available to everyone even if not a grappler. Inputs are easy, just do forward and C or D close to your opponent to land one. Some characters have also air throws done with each jumping direction beside up and C or D (Leona, Clark, Yuri, Benimaru, Mai, Athena).

Ground command throws can be escaped, air ones cannot. Escaping is simple because you can mash CD randomly.

The game engine recognises the escape once you hit the same button used by your opponent to throw. Since the active window for this is very large, you have enough time. So don't scare yourself when you see high level matches and they escape throws so often.

There are some exceptions in escaping command grabs, for instance during AB rolls you can't.

Some command throws offer multihits. Mashing buttons and spinning the stick increases (attack side) or decreases (defence side) the amount.

Special/DM grabs are character specific and commonly related to grappler characters. They require an entire motion to be pulled out and can't be escaped at all. Their range is longer than normal grabs plus they can eat some attacks due to startup speed or invincibility.

Also if your opponent is rolling or escaping by teleport you can notice an increase in range, sometimes really far and strange. This is due to the character's sprite and so hitbox being somewhat split between the starting and the ending position.

Grabs, if timed properly, can eat a landing opponent after an air attack. This can happen because after an air attack the recovery takes more frames than

if compared to an empty jump due to the air attack active frames being converted to recovery frames after hit or whiff. Obviously, beware that a mistake in timings can turn into a big opening for your opponent to retaliate.

If your opponent is AB recovering from a fall they become easy prey for any grab while they can still escape. Characters can't be grabbed for some frames after wakeup so any attempt will result in a whiff.

There's a little bug with special/DM grabs.

If your character faces away from the opponent and you try to grab, it will result in a whiff. Practically, it can happen when you can change side while the opponent is crashing to the ground with no AB fall recovery chance. Once in this situation the opponent can continue with their pressing or wakeup game without fearing any reversal grab.

ii.) Strategies

- Tick throws

Tick throwing grabs basically involves running up close and command grabbing, you have to execute them like this:

Fwd fwd (to run) N (to stop once in range) fwdC/D or

- shortcuts

DM grabs are generally slow due to the inputs required. They often require two half circles back (luckily in kof there is a standard) but inputting them in a relatively short window can be nasty.

Also its difficult to leave blockstun, run and quickly grab to retaliate against the opponent.

However, the buffer system comes in help here like always when we have input difficulties:

hcb run hcb

This is the buffer/shortcut to apply with the obvious warning of timing. The buffer window is pretty large, but this doesn't mean that you can run full screen to catch someone. A proper use of this shortcut is to cover distance with only the starting animation of the forward dash, maybe 2-3 more frames. Hitbox position, like yours being directed towards your opponent and them being near a recovering blow, do the rest.

Buffer helps also in tick throwing or during blockstun.

A basic tick throw attempt involves a poke then a run. While your poke recovers and once the active frame that hits is gone, you can buffer the first hcb then run on the first neutral frame, inputting the last hcb when near the opponent.

The same goes for blockstun. While you're stuck, input the first hcb so once you're free to move you have only to run and give the last inputs to execute the move.

- priority

The game engine assigns some priority when 2 grabs reach the active frame at the same moment in time

DM>special>command

So DM grabs have the highest, specials win only over command.

- Throwing offset

Throwing offset happens only when two grabs of the same kind start within the exact same frame.

Command grabs have the same startup as another. When a throwing offset occurs nothing happens, the only thing you can see is both characters walking toward each other doing nothing. In the case of air throws the same happens - both characters land normally.

Frame data for special and DM grabs tells you that once startup is gone (usually very few frames like 0 or 1), the grappler is ready to catch the opponent. But if both land the active frame in the exact same moment both will whiff.

- alternate guard

Alternate guard is a glitch that allows any character to avoid being grabbed. Any command throw will result in the correspondent attack (close C or D) and a special or DM throw will miss (specials such as Andy's or O.Chris's act like commands).

This bug exists in each kof until Neowave (with exception of KoF2003) and every character can use it.

For the bug to be activated characters have to quickly alternate between standing and crouching guard stance. Once done they will become invulnerable to any kind of throw.

There's not a precise timing for this just keep a quick rhythm.

Obviously to make this happens you have to guard an attack or simply hold back or down back while your opponent is whiffing moves from a distance.

The real application for alternate guard is to completely avoid tick throw attempts from your opponent or to retaliate back.

Since each special or DM grab has slow recovery time, a whiffed one from close distance can result in eating a big damaging combo so beware of using tick throws against opponents that can alternate guard well.

However this technique isn't completely safe. While you're alternating high and low stances you're still vulnerable to lows or overheads.

Here it's all up to you in guessing or reading your opponent's choice.

Overheads are generally slower but low pokes can lead to severe damage or bad situations.

Frame wise the fastest overhead in the game (Vanessa's and Yamazaki's) take 13 frames before the first active one, a low B can hit after 2.

Another weak point to AG occurs when your opponent grabs you from the back. If their character rolls or jumps over yours while AGing, you won't change the side they are facing.

It's really difficult to catch someone in the back like that but you have to know that it is possible.

Alternate guard is surely a nice weapon to counter grapplers. Its strategic use is deep and both players can exploit flaws to their point of view resulting in mind games.

For an AG user I would recommend not abusing the high/low dance too much. A more effective AG is done within a few frames because grabs have range, so once the opponent is too far to grab, quit dancing (stopping being vulnerable to high/low, 50/50 mindgames) and react to the whiffed throw attempt. Also beware low attacks - once you're caught by a lowB while dancing you can't alternate guard anymore because you leave guard stance, becoming prey to grabs again.

Grapplers have to limit their tick throw game, using other mixups and forcing the opponent to forget to alternate guard. Overheads or lows do the job, tick throw only when you see them stuck there guessing a sweep.

On the down side, an alternating guarding opponent is stuck and while dancing can't move or fast react to your pressing so you can take advantage of this. It's always situation dependant.

3) BC mode

Well, you know that super cancels gave previous KoFs a nice addition to the entire gameplay, and overall this applies to every fighting game with this feature.

But what about cancelling a special move into another special?

BC mode allows you to do this but the entire system is a little more complex. Let's get into it.

We are going to analyze different aspects of this feature. First of all what BC mode actually is.

i.) Activation and features

The simplest way to activate BC mode (BC from now on) is to press exactly B and C together. Once done, your character does a special pose that lasts a few frames using one stock of the gauge bar, and glows yellow.

You will also notice an additional gauge bar that depletes itself over time.

This is a sort of timer that tells you how long your character remains in BC, and you can evaluate how many more free cancels you have.

Each free cancel uses up about 1/5 of the BC bar. Beware as not every move can be cancelled into another. For example, not each hit of some multi hit moves can be cancelled. Here you have to experiment by yourself.

One of the most important features about BC is the fact that you're allowed to use SDMs costing another stock and HSDMs with one more stock plus the condition that your health bar has to be around 10% (referring to the old Max system this is called 'red zone').

The downside of entering BC is the fact that you can't charge additional stocks and your damage is lowered by about 30%.

Pressing BC while you're hitting your opponent with a normal attack uses up 2 gauge stocks and your character recovers immediately. In terms of frame data your character nullifies every frame that comes after the active one that hit, so gaining a lot of frame advantage while the opponent is still stuck in hit or block stun animation.

Standalone activation is not recommended as no decent player will fall for easy traps or sit there eating your attack. Choose run shortcuts, quickpresses and bypasses (more on that later) instead, especially if you understand the whole range of options that the BC engine allows. You can use it to fake and trick any opponent or just use your imagination during pressing strings, but obviously practice these beforehand.

We said that activating BC out of any blow will make your character recover immediately. This can also be used to cover some openings, like some normals which, when guarded, are usually open to retaliation. Iori's sweep is good example. When you see that your opponent has guarded his cr.D and is ready to retaliate, press BC to recover immediately and punish if needed. Stuff like this can be of help in pressing the advantage and maintaining momentum.

Kusanagi on a guarding opponent can do:

fwdB (1 hit) BC close B into dpA/C qcfD, D etc etc.

K9999: close D (overhead) BC crB crD qcfA dpA etc etc.

Both examples work on an opponent that is guarding your overhead, the quick recover after BC gives them hardly any time to react and quickly guess on the following attack.

Be aware of this as the more stuff you know and you're able to pull off the more chances you can have to take away your opponent's lifebar. I'll never be tired of saying that the more you use your imagination and bait strategies the more you'll be effective.

ii.) **First approach: Bypass**

Bypass is the art to activate any special move that leaves you in BC mode after the special's animation.

You all surely know that in kof2002 there are cancellable and not cancellable hits.

Bypass works best with non cancellable hits. Once you land a standalone command move (overheads are the most used) simply input the move you like with BC.

Kim: fwd B qcb BC

With this Kim will cancel the overhead into the sanren geki (C version) entering BC mode using up 2 gauge stocks. The obvious thing here is the fact that bypass only works with moves that require/combo with the B or C button. Bypass won't involve the button priority, otherwise in the Kim example after qcb BC a weak hangetsuzan should have come out. Find which move the game engine 'prefers' as it's the only way to learn.

You can also bypass directly into DMs using up 2 stocks and the BC input trick:

Yamazaki: fwdA (2 hit) hcb*2BC

Grabs are the most useful even if experts prefer longer combos. You can also bypass from cancellable attacks, but you have to watch out for a couple of things. Since we have that priority over buttons once you cancel the active frames into a special with BC, the feature won't activate and instead a special move comes out (priority depending). If you want to bypass you have to cancel from recovery frames (the frame after the one that hit), just cancel as soon as possible so your opponent does not leave hitstun status.

iii.) Intermediate:

- BC walk

You cancel the active frame of a strong or a command attack into the walk animation to reach your opponent again and continue with any combo of your choice.
Just keep holding forward and press BC.

However you only have a few frames to get close and continue a combo. You can use this with characters whose close attacks activate from considerable distance and have few startup frames (Kula, Kim, Terry, Vice, Vanessa), but since you can't get so close to your opponent most of the flashy and damaging combos won't link.

This is really for beginners and I don't want you to consider it too much since it's better to switch directly to the next level.

- BC run

You can cancel the active frame of a strong or a command attack into the run animation to reach your opponent again and continue with any combo of your choice.

The shortcut you have to apply is:

Fwd, fwd + BC

This also involves the buffer system since you store the first fwd input needed to run, so that once you cancel your blow with BC only another fwd is required to cancel into a run.

BC running can be used for the whole duration of your active frames, therefore cancelling near the last few active frames will give you less time to run close and connect any other hits.

The consequence of this will often result in missing some combos that require strict timing.

This is the most used technique in combo making and in versus since it's the most practical to pull off. About 90% of BC combos are about strong + BC run or strong + command + BC run.

It requires a bit of skill to hit confirm. For some combos the timings are easy since KoF02 has those chainable command moves, but there are some characters that don't have them and you have to learn how to BC run from quick close attacks.

BC running from command attacks can be really easy since most of their inputs are either forward or down forward.

Buffers come in help here - while you input your fwdA/B/C/D the engine is buffering the first fwd needed for the run, so to BC run you only have to input fwd+BC.

Differently from bypass, there aren't noticeable changes with BC running out cancellable attacks, but you can still activate it out of non cancellable commands such as overheads.

Let's see some easy examples:

Vice: close D (2 hits) BC run close D (2 hits) hcb*2 BD

Terry: close C (2 hits) BC run close C (2 hits) dfC qcb,f AC

I want to focus on those two above combos.

Vice's one is the easiest to execute and land since her close D activates from quite a far distance from the opponent, plus her grab SDM has nice range too so you don't have to worry about little mistakes in execution.

With Terry, to get the dfC and SDM to connect after the second close C you have to cancel into BC run on the first active frame of the second hit of his close C.

His attack gives a lot of pushback and his active frames are a lot too:

startup 3,
1st hit active frames 3,
1st hit recovery / 2nd hit startup 0,
2nd hit active frames 7,
recovery 15

If you manage to cancel on the very first active frame of the second hit you have a whole 6+15 frames to run close and connect whatever you want which is plenty of time. Timings are also strict for combos that start from jumpins since pushback is greater.

iv.) Advanced:

- *quickpress*

Quickpress can be applied to BC mode as well for other combos. It's a really deep feature that involves both buffer and shortcut definitions as well as button priority.

The symbol used to represent Quickpress is the ~ :

A~B

This means that you have to hit B just after A, almost together but B has to be inputted within a certain inexplicit range after A. For simplicity, let's assume that we have to input a frame after the first, but keep in mind that the window is a bit larger.

The first application I want to discuss for quickpress is related to BC mode.

BC quickpress is like a BC bypass to normal blows instead of special moves, so think of it as a direct consequence. As usual, it's always better to use quickpress out of non cancelable moves. It's still possible to activate BC from cancelable hits, but this means that you have to cancel out the first recovery frame instead of the active one.

We have two options:

B~C

C~B

This allows you to enter BC status while B or C chains from your previous attack, then continue with a combo of your choice.

Examples with almost everyone (not often used or practical):

close C, C~B, any combo.

crouch B, C~B, any combo.

The most practical use for the BC quickpress is for low combos that start with a crB or any other attack that can hit low.
Some characters don't have useful low combos or any great high/low mixup chances, but a BC quickpress can cover these flaws.

Each character can do a crB C~B that will result in a chain like crB, C (while maxed) and continue with some free cancels.
So thanks to BC mode each character has a low combo even if the timing can be strict.
Obviously, some are useful and some not.

The most common used quickpress combos have starters like:

crB crB~C

Such as:

Choi: crB crB~C qcfA hcbB (do you still remember buffers?)

Kusanagi: crB crB~C crA qcf*2AC

Yuri: crB crB~C crA qcf*2 BD

Billy: crB crB~C crB qcf*2 AC (notice that crB is cancellable)

Beware during the low combo that there's still the 'button priority' issue. The strange thing about BC quickpress is that if you input a crBC out of another attack (like cr.A or cr.B), a crB~C will always come out. This has two consequences; one that makes crB~C quickpress activation easier, the other is that if you input C~B too quickly a BC can be recognized from the game engine and so completely screw your combos.

Practice, practice, practice, practice..

- Quickpress for other combos

The quickpress feature couples perfectly with buffer system. This is a more complex concept, but you'll realize that a lot of cool and damaging combos can be pulled out thanks to this.

Example:

Iori: (red health) hcb,f A/C far C qcb qcf b f AC (hsdm)

You have to buffer the whole HSDM input while Iori is landing the Scum Gale. Once ready while the opponent is pushed away, you can input far C (wait for the active frame to hit) then BC~AC.

Notice here how two or more concepts we've talked about so far work together - the buffer system allowing you to input the hsdm motion while Iori grabs the opponent, BC activation allowing you to enter BC out of a far C recovering immediately, and quickpress allowing the sdm to come out before the buffer and the hitstun animation of the opponent ends.

v.) BC applications and strategies

Ok, we've covered everything about BC mode's features. It's now time to see how we should use it during vs matches.

Standalone activation is a so-so. I mean you can always activate your BC with only one stock and try some mixups or guard crush strings, but the problem with this is that once your opponent sees you glowing yellow they can anticipate your whole strategy and can start turtling and escaping each approach, trying to waste time and deplete your Max status. In addition, you won't charge additional stocks and suffer a damage reduction for the whole duration. Therefore it is recommended to avoid standalone activation. The clear fact is that once you activate BC while hitting your opponent you actually deal tons of damage and put yourself in the advantage eg: health difference, knockdown status, reverse guard etc. Also, never underestimate the psychological damage dealt to your opponent. BC combos are not only damaging, but flashy and cool plus not easy to execute so your opponent

will be subject to additional pressure to “turn the tables” and can easily make mistakes once overwhelmed by any perfect execution and damage. The reverse side of the blade can be the psychological pressure over you if you miss a combo and therefore squander the chance to end a round or a match. Here only practice and concentration will be of help. The key to victory has to be ‘once I have the chance to kill an opponent I have to do it’. I’ve seen too many matches where a player tries to save a stock and suffered a comeback to eventually lose, or wasted additional stocks to win. Remember, not only you can do 100% BC combos, your opponent can too, and a red healthed Vanessa can kill everyone. For a BC combo to be landed successfully you have to raise your skills in hit confirmation, so once you see an opening, you can go for the highest possible damage.

You have to know your opponent’s flaws and where to retaliate thanks to frame analysis and experience. Tiers are a reality, but you can study your matchup and win even with the lowest one.

BCs can also lead to guard crush where the opponent is only hit with the finisher/DM/SDM/HSDM. There are some 100% guard crush strings, but in general once you see a red flash to your opponent’s life bar just go for any BC.

Guard crush strategies can vary from one character to another, just know your potential and develop your strings.

Just watch out for guard CDs so as not to not waste stocks.

Beware of another important thing - using stocks to BC isn’t always the best solution. In kof2002, damage won’t come only out of BCs - more than one character has the same or more damage potential with a normal or supercancel combo than a 3 stock BC or a wasteful 4 stock one.

Iori and Chris are great examples, but always apply similar analysis to your team.

Iori’s BC usefulness comes after his 4 stock combo (the one that involves his SDM) before that, his best damaging combo is

C fwdA qcf, hcb A/C. Its damage is about half a lifebar, pretty much the same as his standard hcbD dpC BC cancel combo, but BC running and free cancelling is surely more difficult and mistake prone than any simple strong+command+DM+followup.

In this case the easiest choice is always the best.

Chris doesn't have any useful BC combos at all. His damage is so low that even a 4 stock attempt will result in a unworthy 50-60% damage so avoid this at all costs. It's better to use stocks for CDs, ABs, or save them for your next character.

But remember, if you can kill, then kill no matter what.

- stock building

BC combos require stocks, this is a fact.

If you plan to use your flashy combos during vs play, be careful to satisfy the requirements. Some characters have two stock heavy damage/kill (Vanessa, Omoteyashiro, Yamazaki), some have combos that lead to an advantage position (Kim), while others require more than three stocks and so on.

Be aware also that stocks are also needed to CD or AB.

Stock building strategies involve safe (if whiffed from distance) moves. If you have your space and nothing better to do, maybe due to any turtling or escape happy opponent or while he's lying on the ground or falling, just spam some specials then let him taste some goodies once you're ready. Similarly, don't allow your opponent to build stocks. Try different strategies to bait him into empty guard CD or rolls and so reducing their damage potential.

You also know that the kof2002 engine allows you to build up 3,4 or 5 stocks depending on the character position. A nice and simple stock building strategy is to choose characters from the less BC friendly to the most. For example, Athena doesn't need stocks for BCs since she doesn't have any practical ones, but she's a great stock builder & she's a bitch to play against without any. A good position for is starter. Four stocks are enough for any BC combo to do 90 or 100% damage, so any character that can do that is a good choice for second position (Yamazaki). Some characters rely too much on stocks and have poor stock building abilities, so it's better to keep them for last and give them as many stocks as possible. Also, your last character is both your butt-saver and damage dealer if you manage to keep 5 stocks and find an opening - wow, you win.

4) Tiering

When it comes to tiers, every discussion can turn into an argument. I think this is the most delicate discussion concerning fighting games.

King of fighters is no exception. Since no game is perfectly balanced, tiers exists.

Tiering is not an empirical concept, it comes from analysis that tells how balanced a match is between two characters.

The final result is a table like:

name	A	B	C	D	total
A	-	2	5	6	13
B	8	-	3	4	15
C	5	7	-	4	16
D	4	6	6	-	16

This tells the outcome for each possible match.

Those numbers tell in a range of 10 how much a match is in favor or not to a character, with 5 being a tie.

Statistically those numbers can be considered as a percentage, so a tie is a 50% chance to win for both.

We have: A lose to B 2-8, tie with C and win over D with 6-4, B own 8-2 A while lose 7-3 to C and 6-4 to D, C tie A and win over C with 7-3 and lose 6-4 to D, D lose 4-6 to A and win 6-4 to both B and C. Their total is 13 for A, 15 for B and 16 C and D.

When two or more characters have the same placement, to decide who's higher it's a good idea to consider their direct matchup. The tier list here is D and C with the same rank, B, A.

Usually tier list ranks are indicated with letters (A,B,C, etc) depending on how many different ranks there are. Sometimes when there is a character with a lot of advantages you can see 'S' rank which is the highest possible rank to achieve.

Tier lists also show how balanced the game is and if a game is broken or not. If you see a large variety of usable characters or few ranks, then that game is clearly well balanced. A little distance between the highest rank and the bottom rank means that you can be competitive with everyone.

Also beware not to get caught in some common mistakes as tier lists are direct consequences of matchup charts.

Tier lists don't tell that the highest tier wins over the rest, but their overall placement is the top, meaning that their winning rate is the highest. As you can see in the example above, a top tier can lose a match with the bottom one but overall still lead the game. It also happens that B wins over A that wins over D but D wins over B. This is the meaning of true game balance and tiering.

Obviously, the more characters you have the more difficult it is to balance the game. Kof2002 has 43 playable characters, but no one is really trash beside a few - it's overall balance is really good thanks also to the 3 on 3 battle system that allows your team composition to cover more possible matchups.

A last note is to remember that matchup charts can be constantly upgraded, while they can't be messed up after a while some minor adjustments can occur. It depends a lot on how many players that game has and so how fluent is its scene. The more the game is played, the more strategies will be uncovered and the more the matchup chart can suffer changes.

This may go against what was said before, but keep in mind that no analysis is done to a game that isn't played. People play a game and if they like it they analyze the game and go in deep.. after some time things become almost definitive.

i.) Parameters

The most delicate argument to discuss now is about the parameters that are involved in tiering. I always prefer to refer to Japanese analysis since they're the most valuable and go the deepest. I've also noticed that they're the most accurate and logical. Sometimes I read tier discussions that involve too many random, strange or empirical considerations when I prefer solid basis information that shows me easy, trustable points and direct consequences.

A good thing to start with is saying that a player's ability doesn't play such an important role in tiering.

Saying this in a discussion will surely start an argument due to some ignorance.

Player ability is a matter that can completely mess up a tier list: a player's mind, skill and strategies can overcome character's flaws and also screw up your opponent's concentration.

Matches involve bait strategies that rely heavily on trying to exploit the opponent's and character's flaws to your advantage. Basically when you fight someone, you want him to do what you want so that you can damage them once lured into your traps. Poking, pressing and so on work together in the baiting process.

So, player ability won't change a lot of factors while the matchup chart is drawn. If your character has tons of frame disadvantage, slow attacks, poor mixup abilities and poor damage, then player ability can't directly change these while it can still turn the tide in baiting and punishing player's flaws. More clearly, my ability with Kyo (that is generally low ranked in kof2002) can be higher than yours with Athena, but this won't change the fact that Athena has stronger options to deal with Kyo and so win.

The only parameter where player ability is considered is the learning curve of a character.

It's easier to learn and be effective with a character that has only a few yet strong options instead of learning tons of situational chains.

Quick comparisons between Billy and Angel: surely Angel is a strong character, tons of damage from long combos and quite a lot of mixup possibilities such as high/low mind games or crossup chances, but her learning curve can be an obstacle since you have to master a lot of chains, move properties, infinite juggles and such that require high execution skills. On the other hand, to be effective with Billy you have to only focus on your poking game. His crA is a long ranged poke that can prevent anyone from getting close, fwdA has godly priority and is fast to come out for retaliation, great anti-air and strong reversal moves are simple but effective weapons to deal against everyone.

Someone told me that once you reach high level play and have strong execution skills that the learning curve isn't such an important factor. This is wrong. I'll forever say that to learn some chains or BC combos requires

some time in practice mode, while baiting or applying the right choice depending on the situation is more inclined to mistakes. Also statistically it's easier to mess up long situational or character specific chains than screw up few high priority pokes.

Japanese players like to put in their evaluations the following:

- Damage
- Attack and Mixup ability
- Defense
- Gauge dependence and supply ability
- Synergy, where they like to put everything together.

Finally they compare each character to see who wins that particular matchup.

Damage is effectively how much lifebar you can take away with your chains, and involves both b&b and situational combos. If your character can take off a great amount of the opponent's lifebar when they have the chance, its ranking in 'damage' will be high

Attack and mixup ability tells how effective your pressing can be and how many situations to hit your opponent you may be able to create or have. This involves a lot of factors such as normal or special move properties, hitboxes, and guard crush potential. If you have overheads, lows, standings that hit low, grab, an effective crossup and attacks that don't allow recovery roll, you may have a good advantage over your opponent.

Defense tells how well you deal against an opponent attacks and pressing strings. First of all, notice that each character suffers different damage from another one.

Since the game has a real good component, you see that big and tall characters are the slowest yet the most resistant to assaults. Maxima, Goro, Yashiro, Chang and some other brutes suffer less damage than a cute little girl like Kula. Surely female characters in general are weaker than their male counterparts so they take an extra percentage of damage. This is not always 100% true since balance has to come in to adjust this. The Japanese draw up charts to have a quick reference on things like this.

Gauge dependence and supply ability are parameters that tell if a character needs stocks to be effective or what boost they get with them and if they have nice stock building ability to pass them on to another character.

This also involves the combo ability parameter.

For example, Choi doesn't have a damaging b&b, his highest damage is achieved from his poke, poke, poke DM combo, so surely he is more stock dependent than Billy that has good damage b&bs.

Also stock dependence raises if your character lacks defense such as reversals or anti-air, because you surely need some stocks to AB and CD out of any annoying pressing pattern.

If a character is heavily stock dependent, their supply ability may be low.

Billy or Athena are wonderful stock builders and suppliers, they can quickly build stocks for them and for successive characters since their moveset allows them to charge the gauge bar in a short amount of time with a number of hits or whiffed moves.

Synergy tells how the above parameters work together for the victory goal. Surely Chris's damage and attack/mixup synergy is poor, since he has tons of ways to land combos, but his damage is that low that he has to hit many times to take away life.

On the other side, Chang deal tons of damage but it's harder for him to find the chance to do so.

Kim is a good example of that synergy - he has both a lot of options and high damage. Surely his 'synergy' parameter is higher compared to Chris's and Maxima's..

You can compare each parameter to see consequences, but keep in mind that a lot of things are like that due to game balance.

Obviously there are more in depth parameters to be considered in an analysis. You have to watch for move priorities and properties and a lot of other minor factors that decide the tier placement.

A deep analysis may also involve wakeup speed.

A slow character like Maxima (34 wakeup frames) can be easier prey for wakeup games than Yuri or Ralf that stand up in a blink (12 wakeup frames).

When you draw your matchup chart you have to compare both characters in each of their field to see who's the strongest/highest tier.

Obviously there are tons of other parameters to consider that may refer only to that particular matchup. Always be aware that only when you have considered everything can you reach the final result or at least a reliable one.

A quick example can be Athena against Seth. If you consider only damage as the judgment parameter then Seth beats Athena every time, everywhere. So a non-expert analyzer can reach a wrong conclusion - that Seth is stronger than Athena.

Everyone knows that Athena is a lot of tiers higher than Seth. This came from another analysis, the one that involves their character kind and attack/defense.

Seth is close range character, Athena is more keep away than close (although she can switch to some strong pressing strings).

Athena's keep away fireball game is fairly stronger than Seth's ability to close distance.

So Seth will have a hard time while trying to reach a distance where he can lead the match.

In addition, there are other factors to be thrown in before reaching the final conclusion. Seth require stocks, a lot of stocks since he lacks defense and building ability whereas Athena is a power supply - her fireballs can quickly raise a full gauge in one round.

Combo-wise, Seth require more ability than Athena and so on.

Obviously remember that this is only theory fighting. Player ability still can change a result as we have already discussed before.

ii.) Counter pick

Kof's 3on3 battle system allow you to cover any possible disadvantageous matchup. You can try reading your opponent's strategy and pick whatever character you find comfortable to use against his.

This is heavily related to the matchup analysis discussed before. As said before, even top tiers may have a bad or a balanced matchup, and against some characters you can have more freedom while against others not.

Another great thing to remember is that some characters can be played in more than one way, so you can change the way you play against your opponent and still be effective.

Kim for example can play at close or far distance.

To play close he has a lot of safe strings plus the haki cancel glitch, while from far he can poke with A and turtle feeling safe with his defensive attacks (Hienzan or qcf*2K DM).

Check also how his stock dependence changes with each style.

With stocks, he has some 3/4 stock 80 - 100% that leave him in a tremendous advantage position.

With haki cancels Kim is a close range beast, but you have to forget stocks and use them whenever you can.

The same is for Vanessa. She's a universally recognized monster with her infamous 2/3 stock kill, but she can poke and escape all the time becoming even more annoying.

Yamazaki is a tank that can switch from aggressive style and land 90 - 100% damage combos to control space annoyingly well.

So, know what you're doing and change your strategy matchup accordingly.

People really love to complain about tiers, especially while dealing with tops. You'll often listen about brokenness, cheapness and some other easy words from guys that never bothered to check the direct matchup between two characters.

Sometimes it can happen that there are really unplayable characters, but aside from them, I think that a good player can find chances to win with everyone.

Another thing to consider is how a character suits your style and if you can use their full potential.

Different players don't have the same skills or preferences - there are those who have high skills in combomaking, or those who may prefer a simple (yet effective) game plan.

You could prefer rush down based tactics over turtling to be effective.

Even if it's true that some characters have some advantage over others, it's also true that some players can use some characters in a way that another can't.

Stop whining about tiers!

5) General strategies and match approach

Now it's time to gather each concept we've seen until now and focus on what is most important to a kof player.

Entertainment

Surely we don't play for only glory and such - we mainly play to have fun and spend time with friends or random people in arcades.

For people like us (hardcore gamers), entertainment is also knowing everything about our favorite game and so play it to its full potential.

I think that if I have to play modern fighting games in a primitive way then it's better to quit.

Also, going in deep with each feature is somewhat a show of respect to those who dedicate their time making & releasing new and fresh games.

So, my first advice is to learn each feature and reach the most complete status possible so you can rely on more than one weapon to deal with each situation.

Once you have everything in hand you can start developing your own strategies.

In the following pages I want to give some advice about usable strategies in a match.

Before that, I want to give the most important advice.

Improve your execution.

You have to enter a match sure that you can execute what you want when you want.

It's a shame to lose a match if your special move won't come out or if your combo stops after only a few hits allowing the opponent to comeback.

Practice until you reach 100% execution success.

Baiting is the most simple but effective approach but a really deep concept in itself.

Basically, you want your opponent to do what you want and react so he can eat your mixups or combo.

This is also in the concept of poking. Using fast and safe attacks or strings are good to lure the opponent in your traps.

You have to learn to train your opponent as a dummy exploiting his reaction. I mean, if you low combo only, your opponent can focus on these and not worry about an overhead.

There are so many basic strategies such as jump ins or run close then low combo, then when you see that he's trained to guard low go for the overhead. Try to put some neutral frames in between making it hard to guess on your possible action or to force a reaction you can retaliate.

Don't play gimmicks all the time. If you go on with the same pattern for the whole match your strategy will be easily beaten.

Always change pressing strings. A decent player won't fall more than twice for the same trap.

Check move properties, crossup chances and positioning. Learn to control your space, finding the best distance to keep.

Prevent him from applying his strategies and don't allow them to stock build or to bait you into random rushes.

Retaliate at every opportunity. If done correctly you opponent can feel harmless and become more inclined to make mistakes.

Also if you show him that you won't eat some free stuff, surely he'll be dizzy for some time before changing his strategy, so committing mistakes.

I'll forever say, as you can notice it in each chapter of this guide, that you always have to change your approach depending on the situation. Maybe the real strength of a player is within this skill.

Different players have different approaches, someone could prefer to turtle all the time, someone else could rush you down and nothing more. Or someone can combine both to lead the game quickly switching between offense and defense.

Try to read opponent strategies and reactions. Don't rush blindly. It's pointless to rush an escaping happy opponent especially when they have

characters who excel at controlling space (such as fireballers or far ranged pokers). Calm down and take your time to think, force him to fall in some patterns and try to land the max possible damage combo, only when you have your chance, don't try to land it like a monkey.

You have to raise this skill with experience, when you enter tournaments you don't know your opponent's ability.

Move your ass out of your opponent's pressing, the more you stay stuck there the more you're inclined to eat mixups.

This is a delicate argument, try to make your reactions faster, and anti-air or hop prevent only on reaction.

Beware about lows, but don't fall for overheads either.

Don't guess a jump in, you'll fall for easy empty dp baits. You have to learn to react when you actually see an attempt, in order to achieve this you have to speed up your execution and reactions.

You can guess only when you have trained your opponent to your 'patterns' or if someone has already shown you his flawed patterns, but beware that experts won't fall for such easy traps.

Try not to lose your advantage position due to a rush. This means that you have to value each attack or string.

Sometimes if you lose your pressing or distance, especially against long ranged characters, you may not be able to get close again, so screwing your chances to win.

Nerves play a big role during a match. The more you are able to keep your concentration the less you become inclined to mistakes. Stay focused and understand everything that is happening.

Don't go ape if you miss a combo, calm down then try again to find an opening and land your damage.

If you see that your opponent is landing easy damage on you with simple combos, check your patterns and quickly change your approach.

Someone may have wonderful retaliation skills due to a great pattern-reading ability or fast reactions. Make sure you don't fall for them as they could want you to use all of your pressure strings seeking for a gap. Even a whiffed sweep can be retaliated by a fast and concentrating player.

If so, play as safe as possible. If they turtle, do it yourself or try to rush them down randomly with fast and safe strings. You'll surely damage his concentration, guessing and reaction ability.

Always try to force your rhythm and change it to bait your opponent. Quickly rush then escape. Give him a hard time while following up your choices so he makes mistakes.

The last thing to discuss is about choosing between a chance do land direct damage or to force a mixup.

After some occurrences you're able to choose between the two, I mean, when you launch your opponent in the air you can land damage with any special followup or hit with a normal blow to reset and try a high/low or crossup game.

Sometimes it's hard to make a decision here.

Landing direct damage, in short terms, is the quickest way to win a round or to gain an advantage.

Sometime it can become really difficult to cover some health gaps. Players may rush blindly in to tie and so fall into your trap.

Trying a mixup is potentially better if you manage to place the opponent in a bad situation, so you can force him to eat your high/low, or bait them to blindly rush in and so open himself to more damage than you would normally deal.

Choose the best outcome after a combo.

Sometimes you may prefer to keep the opponent cornered instead of slamming him from side to side.

Most special grabs reverse sides, and it can be a bad choice if in that situation you have to keep the opponent cornered or in range allowing him to turtle or escape after wakeup.

On the other side, while dealing more damage and sending him away from you, you can turtle yourself.

Apply the best knockdown move. You may prefer a non rollable one so you have more time to prepare your wakeup game, or you may want him to safe fall to attempt your mixup.

Everything is really up to your preference or situation.

Sometimes it's better to go for the direct damage, some other times not.

This may depend also on your opponent, his character or yours, if he's good at guessing with good reactions or his character has good options to deal with that situation. If you feel that your mixup game isn't that strong, it's better to switch for the damage. But if he doesn't have any strong chance to escape or he's suffering from match pressure/lack of nerves, he can be more inclined to make a bad guess and so eat more damage or get caught in another bad situation.

It's always a matter of decision and adaption to every bad situation possible.

I think that damage should be directly dealt, no matter what, when you have a chance to kill and so win a round.

I've seen too many matches where someone tries to save a stock or force a mixup and suffered a comeback, lost a whole round, or to win had to waste more resources than normal.

Since players aren't machines but human, they're always inclined to make mistakes, and there's no worse situation than an opponent trying to fight each life bar's pixel, especially when they're already feeling defeat but won't give up. So, in order to prevent this I suggest to kill whenever you can, even if it means using a whole stock to take away a small life bar.

Play and watch all the matches you can, this will surely increase your experience and knowledge.

You can steal some patterns, strings and ideas to develop yourself in more ways. This means that you have to know why you have to apply that choice - it's pointless to blind copycat the tactics of top player X as you can't achieve the same effectiveness.

This is a very common mistake that players often fall into.

I don't like reading about "oh my mixups are the same as his but I always lose badly, I can't improve, I can't win".

Apply the best choice to each situation, changing from time to time, adapting to your opponent. If you see that he won't eat your stuff, vary them. Also, practicing in versus matches will surely improve your execution while you're under pressure.

Oh, it's a totally different matter if you're playing random matches and you want only to have fun without focusing too much about victory, or you just want to practice your mixup, strings and combos.

But since in a tournament only victory is important, think only how to win in the easiest way. Yes, even playing cheap.

6) Credits

Without the following I would never have had the chance to learn kof2002. More than half of my knowledge comes from them.

RKZ.com

The very first kof source I had back in my very noob days. A lot of nice and skilled Pakistan guys over there. Recently it's back online after a year or so. Give it a try.

Orochinagi.com

I started there back in 2004 and it was one of my first forums. The old board is still up with tons of interesting discussions while the new site hosts tons of new videos and discussions.

Cyberfanatix.com

My main reference and internet home right now, Remukhan, did a wonderful job with this website and some cool guys there added the rest. There are a lot of top players gathered there - to read their posts is a pleasure. Most of the strategic hints in this guide come from the 'universal strategy' thread there.
Too many to list, thanks to all.

Non stop kyo

He was my mentor at the time, and he also appears in one of the noobest cmv's ever, my infamous 'shura: first exhibition'. It still can be found over arcade-extreme.com, but it's a shame lol.

A great job of his were the three faq collections about BC mode and my guide is freely inspired by them. Hosted by old cyberfanatix.cbj.net, now lost (no one knows where). Maybe they're too outdated now (especially if compared to this :P).

Kao Megura & Gamefaqs

A guy that we will never forget..

I read each one of his faqs since I started playing kof.

Gamefaqs is a place where everyone starts from. No real deep information there, but a wonderful source for starters.

Shorvuken.com

Not too much kof love there since it's a Street Fighter based website, but some guys there love, play and know a lot about kof. I use Rengoku nickname on those boards.

Comesonobravo

The Japanese are amazing, they create fighting games, they have the knowledge, they have the skills.

Sadly, too much of this 'deepness' will never be known since there aren't good translators. If you want to try, just search for any of their wiki or BBS, which include tons, tons and tons of analysis, matchup charts, tier discussion, frame data and strategy held by their blogs and those damned ideograms.

English editors: Atb_555 & Gahrlling

I've noticed that the first release of this faq had poor English grammar due to my fault so I've decided to charge someone else with corrections and format adjustments. I've found two cool guys at NeoEmpire.com (UK's fighting games website/forum) both Atb_555 and Gahrlling are responsible of the great job you've read until now.

Me, Shura/Shura30/Rengoku

Obviously I am the one who wrote this faq, I really hope that this will help someone improve their game.

There are a lot of other things to explain, I saw that the more I write, the more I have to add to clearly explain everything. I think this faq will be forever in progress..

By the way, if you have suggestions, comments or just insults about my poor English grammar (I'm Italian for those who don't know me) here's my msn messenger and mail: shura30@msn.com

Version history
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