

Takemusu Aikido Grading Syllabus.

Introduction.

Ranks are divided into 6 kyu ranks (white belt) and 10 dan ranks (black belt). The hakama is worn from 3rd kyu onwards.

At the Kyu level dojo-cho's should consider each student individually and award grade either through testing or recommendation as appropriate in each case.

At the Dan level examinations are required up to and including yondan and are carried out by the members of the examination committee with the candidate's instructor in attendance. Dan ranks are Aikikai recognised ranks.

Dan examination candidates are required to have attended three full seminars (two days minimum) in the 18 months prior to the exam (by any senior Aikido teacher nationally or internationally). This is to ensure that candidates during their preparation not only step outside of their comfort zone and challenge themselves beyond the confines of their regular group but also are exposed to other teachers to give them different perspectives on their practice and challenge their understanding and ability in different ways.

For testing and grading costs please consult with instructors.

For a translation of the basic terminology please check the glossary in the Aikido Compendium (takn.nl).

Dan Grade Examination Committee.

In the Netherlands the examination committee consists of all yondan grades and above and includes the Technical Director (currently Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros, rokudan). For an examination to be valid three members including the Technical Director must be present. The candidate's instructor must be present but has no say in the decision making process. The Technical Director has the power of veto although the committee always strives for consensus.

Internationally, exams are carried out by the Technical Director with senior ranks in attendance (preferably at least two).

Testing rationale and objectives.

The Syllabus can be understood as both a roadmap to acquiring the basic techniques and as a check on one's level of progress in the understanding and embodiment of the Principles of Aikido. Technique and Principle should be understood as two interrelated aspects with Technique the outer form and Principle the inner dynamic that gives life and meaning to the the practice.

The grades can be broadly divided into three main areas as discussed below:

- **6-4 kyu**
- **3-1 kyu**
- **shodan - yondan**

6th - 4th kyu

The emphasis at this entry level is on developing ukemi and footwork plus a clear sense of direction and basic movement skill (front and back, entering and turning) in the context of basic solid technique (kihon waza) both with weapon and empty handed training.

Attacks at the 'grasping' level are focused on (katate, morote, ryote, kata dori) and the basic format for aikido training, that of a ritualised agreement (kata) where attacker and receiver take turns practicing pre arranged techniques (nage and uke format) is established.

At the body level the focus is on coordinating hands and feet and relaxing the body weight downwards into the ground as the principle of being balanced is emphasised throughout.

3rd - 1st Kyu

Ukemi, footwork and being balanced remain primary focus points. Once the periphery of the body (hands and feet) are more coordinated and the weight is more 'underneath' further Principles such as being whole and coordinated and being centered are explored along with the relational principles of non resistance, joining and following (awase) which receive more focused attention.

The objective by 1st kyu is to have a clear idea as to the basic techniques as well as a clear idea of the primary principles governing body use, relationship and the generation of power (kokyu ryokyu). 1st kyu is essentially a pre-test for shodan.

Shodan - yondan

Shodan (Katai: solid)

The shodan test in this Syllabus is based on the standard test Saito Morihiro Sensei would give in the Iwama Dojo in Japan as witnessed numerous times by Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros during his stay there from 1985 to 1993.

Shodan literally translates as 'first step' and at this first level the emphasis is on the solid development of the kihon (katai kihon) forms. Technique should be solid and clear, grounded, heavy and balanced. The basic principles of body use (being grounded, being integrated and balanced, being centered and calm) and the basic relational principles (listening, joining, connecting and leading) are not just abstract ideas but can be distinguished in one's experience, albeit at a 'first level' level.

Shodan is the culmination of the training and development undergone through the kyu ranks. As such, at this level the following aspects should be clear and form the essential framework for continued practice and future development.

- **Uke-nage** format of training. Kata understood as a cooperative effort where uke gives nage measured pressure in his attacks and nage measures the power of his techniques in accordance with uke's ability to take ukemi. In this sense this training format is a cooperative engagement and precludes competition. There are no winners or losers, only learners.
- **Levels.** Basic solid to more flowing dynamic with everything in between.
- **Awase.** What harmonising with an opponent 'is' and is 'not'. An understanding of the principle of Non Resistance.
- **Kokyu ryokyu.** 'Whole body power'. The power we are seeking to develop in Aikido is a 'whole body power' generated in our connection with the ground, directed through our center and expressed through our hands (or any other peripheral contact point). This power, and to the extent that we are able to generate it, should be clearly distinguished from using part of our body in isolation to bring about a result (commonly known as 'forcing').
- **Intention.** To understand that Aikido is not a means whereby opponents are simply defeated but that it is a martial art whose ideal is the restoration of harmony beyond the opposites of winning and losing. The ultimate aim of training in Aikido is not to be just an effective fighter, but to not have to fight at all.

However this ideal is not attained by avoiding conflict and hard training but by entering it directly and going through and thus beyond it. It must not be forgotten that that to be able to overcome an aggressive adversary with Aiki entails that the martial and mental skill of the aikidoka are superior to those of the attacker. In this sense Aikido is Budo.

Nidan (yawarakai: flexibleness / suppleness).

The emphasis remains on the kihon solid level but the 'hardness' and 'sharpness' that were more predominant in the techniques at shodan have their 'edges taken off'. The exam is essentially the same as for shodan with a few technical additions but now the form should be, 'smoother', more flexible and supple in execution. Balance and connection are 'deeper'.

Sandan. (nagare: flowing).

After the first two levels which focus on clear solid basics at the static level the emphasis at sandan is on taking the 'yawarakai' quality developed at nidan into movement. The main issue here is not only the 'heavy underneath' quality of one's movement with it's inherent sense of deeper balance but also being able to maintain connection at three fundamental levels: with the ground, with one's self and with the other - and to know when connection at any one of these levels is lost, and hence make the appropriate corrections in real time.

Yondan (ki no nagare: flow of ki).

Yondan is the last rank for which examinations are carried out. Upon reaching yondan in essence the first stage of basic training has been completed (although this never ends as such). The instructor who has been up to this point serving as a guide and 'mirror' for the student's experience and learning process is no longer necessary for his further development. The student can now mirror his own experience and evaluate accurately the feedback that he gets from his actions. He or she has learned 'how to learn'.

From a technical perspective, at yondan one should have a detailed knowledge of the Aikido technical repertoire plus a full understanding of the various levels of practice (kihon, kinonagare, henka, oyo, kaeshi and takemusu aikido) in addition to a firm understanding of the principles that give the techniques their power and the art it's meaning.

In conclusion.

The kyu ranks introduce and build up an understanding of the principles of Aikido, the basic Techniques both at kihon as well as flowing levels and bring the student to the 'first step' of shodan where all the basic elements for further growth in Aikido are in place.

The testing emphasis underlying the four dan ranks are as follows:

- kata kihon: hard solid basic
- yawarakai kihon: supple basic
- nagare: flowing
- ki no nagare: flow of ki

These four distinctions within the traditional two levels of kihon and kinonagare practice were often used by Saito Morihiro Sensei in his teachings and represent a progression of qualitative development when practice is done correctly and mindfully. The main difference between the last two levels is that at the nagare level the emphasis is on a solid 'thick' fluid connection maintained throughout movement. At the last level this connection is further refined as to timing, distance (ma-ai) and connection (ki musubi) such that the connection and control from center to center can be seem almost 'without physical contact' at times as the energetic and mental aspects of control and connection are emphasised. This is the most difficult level to explain well. My own experience with Saito Morihiro Sensei (and other senior teachers) is that simply upon initiating an attack the feeling was of feeling instantly 'smothered' and unable to move freely as Sensei would seem to have immediate control over my center and intent. This is obviously a very advanced level of connection and control and from this techniques can seem casual and effortless.

These qualities can be further illustrated through the following poem by the Founder of Aikido, Morihei Ueshiba.

*Techniques employ four qualities
that reflect the nature of our world.
Depending on circumstance
you should be
hard as a diamond,
flexible as a willow,
smooth flowing like water,
or as empty as space.*

Development in Aikido is endless and the above Syllabus with it's various levels are merely guidelines in a process of growth. Beyond yondan aikido is matter of continuing insights into Aiki both in regular training at one's dojo and in the greater dojo of everyday life.

The further one develops in Aikido the more one leaves behind any ideas or ambitions as to attainment of any kind. 'Beginner's mind' (shoshin), humility and gratitude are the real hallmarks and fruits of sustained, committed and sincere practice in Aikido.

There are no contests in Aikido.

A true warrior is invincible because he or she contests with nothing.

Defeat means to defeat the mind of contention that we harbour within.

Morihei Ueshiba.

KYU GRADE SYLLABUS.

6th kyu.

mae/ushiro ukemi
tai sabaki

tai no henko kihon

morote dori kokyu ho

suwari waza kokyu ho

ken kamae > 1st subrui

jo kamae > choku tsuki

5th kyu

6th kyu

tai no henko ki no nagare

gyaku hanmi katae dori ikkyo omote/ura waza

kosa dori kote gaeshi kihon

ken subrui 1-3

jo suburi 1-5

4th Kyu

6th and 5th kyu

gyaku hanmi katae dori nikkyo omote/ura waza kihon

gyaku hanmi katae dori shiho nage omote/ura waza kihon

ken suburi 1-5

jo roku no kata

3rd kyu

tai no henko kihon/ki no nagare
morote dori kokyu ho
suwari waza kokyu ho

ikkyo-nikkyo-sankyō: omote and ura from shomen uchi

kote gaeshi-shiho nage-irimi nage: one of each from freely chosen attack

buki dori (ken, jo): one of each

ken suburi 1-7

jo suburi 1-10

2nd kyu

tai no henko kihon/ki no nagare
morote dori kokyu ho
suwari waza kokyu ho

ikkyo-nikkyo-sankyō-yonkyō:
omote and ura from shomen uchi

kote gaeshi-shiho nage-irimi nage-kokyu nage:
two of each from freely chosen attack

buki dori (ken, jo): two of each

ken suburi 1-7

jo suburi 1-20

1st kyu

tai no henko kihon/ki no nagare
morote dori kokyu ho
suwari waza kokyu ho

suwari waza:

ikkyo-nikkyo-sankyo-yonkyo-gokkyo
omote and ura from yokomen uchi (gokkyo ura only)

tachi waza:

kote gaeshi-shiho nage-irimi nage-kokyu nage-koshi nage-ushiro waza
three of each from freely chosen attack

buki dori (ken, jo, tanken): three of each

jiyu waza against one opponent

ken suburi 1-7
migi and hidari awase

jo suburi 1-20
31 jo no kata

Dan grade syllabus

Shodan

tai no henko kihon/ki no nagare
morote dori kokyu ho
suwari waza kokyu ho

suwari waza:

ikkyo-nikkyo-sankyo-yonkyo-gokkyo
omote and ura from yokomen uchi (gokkyo ura only)

hanmi handachi three techniques

tachi waza:

kote gaeshi-shiho nage-irimi nage-kokyu nage-koshi nage-ushiro waza
three of each from freely chosen attack

buki dori (ken, jo, tanken): three of each

jiyu waza against two opponents

ken suburi 1-7
happo giri
migi and hidari awase
go no awase / shichi no awake

jo suburi 1-20
happo tsuki
31 jo no kata
13 jo no kata

Nidan

tai no henko kihon/ki no nagare
morote dori kokyu ho
suwari waza kokyu ho

tachi waza

ikkyo-nikkyo-sankyō-yonkyō-gokkyō
one of each from freely chosen attack, omote and ura forms

hanmi handachi. three techniques

kote gaeshi-shiho nage-irimi nage-kokyu nage-koshi nage-ushiro waza-kaiten nage
three of each from freely chosen attacks

jiyu waza buki dori: two opponents (ken and jo)

jiyu waza taijutsu against two opponents

ken suburi 1-7
happo giri
migi and hidari awase
go no awase / shichi no awake
kumitachi 1-5

jo suburi 1-20
happo tsuki
31 jo no kata
13 jo no kata

Sandan

tai no henko : three levels
morote dori kokyu ho: 5 variations
suwari kokyu ho: 5 variations

taijutsu jiyu waza.

6-10 techniques at both kihon as well as ki no nagare (total 12-20 techniques).
The objective is to show a clear distinction between kihon and ki no nagare and the transitions between them.

ushiro waza jiyu waza

6-10 techniques at both kihon as well as ki no nagare (total 12-20 techniques).
The objective is to show a clear distinction between kihon and ki no nagare and the transitions between them.

jo mochi nage jiyu waza three opponents

10 kumijo
13 kata no awake
31 kumijo in steps with connections
(1-3; 4-6; 9-11; 13-18; 18-22; 22-27; 27-31)

Yondan

free demonstration weaving together elements of the following 3 areas

kihon to ki no nagare
ni nin dori
henka waza

free demonstration
kaeshi waza

ki musubi jo tachi
7 kentai jo
31 kumijo at full connected level (ki no nagare) 1-31