

Preparing Students for DAN Tests

Introduction

This is a synopsis of various notes and comments provided by Osawa-sensei and the CAF Examination Committee to CAF member dojos from 2012 to 2023.

This is general advice, not a comprehensive list or a prescription guaranteeing a successful test.

Seminar attendance

Dan test candidates will be required to attend an average of two seminars per year since their last test. The seminars must have been taught by an EC member or Osawa-sensei. An exception will be made for members of remote dojos, where CAF shidoin seminars will count.

Ukemi

- Nages should prearrange ukes for their tests. However, please note that the Technical Director or grading panel may select other ukes at their discretion at the time of the exam.
- While black belts are typically used as ukes in dan tests, senior white belts may also be used, provided they can perform correct ukemi at speed and take falls safely and appropriately.
- Candidates should be prepared to take ukemi for other test candidates. However, depending on physical condition and age, the examiners may exempt certain candidates from this requirement.
- Ukes should attack quickly and flexibly, without pause until instructed to stop. Be sure to begin each attack with proper ma'ai and hanmi.
- Be responsive to nage and take ukemi correctly. This means neither resisting nage nor throwing yourself for no reason.

Nage-waza

- Ensure that you know the names of all test techniques accurately.
- Nage should maintain a serious demeanour during the test, without talking, laughing or smiling unnecessarily.
- Keep good posture and pay attention to kamae at the beginning of the technique.
- Pay attention to ma'ai with the partner — different techniques have different ma'ai.
- Tei nei — be sure to clearly demonstrate the details of techniques while keeping up good energy. Clearly demonstrate footwork and breaking uke's balance. It is crucial to demonstrate the details accurately, rather than use force.
- Show zanshin in the technique: a state of relaxed, alert awareness that persists before, during, and after an action. This can easily be seen after a throw, when nage is in hanmi, stable, balanced, relaxed and calm.
- Practice energetically, but keep in mind your partner's ability to take ukemi to ensure safety. Dangerous practice during testing will not be tolerated and will not result in a successful test.
- Be prepared to perform techniques continuously for 15 to 20 min. at normal speed without stopping during the test. This stamina should be built up through regular, intense practice at your dojo.
- Testing techniques should reflect Doshu's way (the standard), not necessarily the way Osawa-sensei teaches at seminars. For example, show Iriminage with a full turn (often described as "ura") as well as the direct ("omote") way we often practice. Be prepared to demonstrate koshinage.
- When demonstrating submission locks like hijikime where uke cannot take further ukemi, exercise great caution in stressing the joint.
- When doing seated pins, nage should be on his/her toes, rather than in seiza.
- Use your centre and not the upper body in doing techniques. The knees should remain flexible. Avoid throwing the uke with the upper body alone or leaving the back foot planted too far back, which may compromise your mobility.
- Nage should pin uke to the mat at the finish of shiho nage and kotegaeshi, except during jiyu-waza.
- In suwari-waza iriminage, use the shoulder to throw uke, not the hand at the back of the neck.

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Jiyu-waza

- Nage should not wait passively for the next attack. Nage must move in and demonstrate proper maai. Do not back away from the uke.
- Enter and deliver techniques in correct timing. Techniques should be dynamic, not static.
- It is recommended that you demonstrate iriminage, shihonage, kotegaeshi and kaitenage during jiyu-waza, plus additional techniques as required.
- When you are asked to do kokyunage techniques in other parts of the test, avoid using them in jiyu-waza.
- Demonstrate changes in speed appropriate for the circumstances.

Randori

- Ukes should not “take turns” attacking in randori, but also should not “gang up” on nage.
- Attack smoothly and quickly without stopping, while paying attention to the safety of the other ukes.
- Nage should use the whole body to throw in randori, not the upper body.
- Nage should be mindful of the ukes' safety.

General attitudes in training

- Practice exactly what is shown. Follow the instructions closely. Let your partner learn and keep practising. Do not stop the practice and engage in teaching or correcting your partner. Strictly avoid conversation. Make every effort to maximize the amount of practice.
- Practice is meant to help each other learn and improve techniques as instructed. Do not use the practice to serve your own needs. Do not use practice to show off your physical power or technical superiority.
- Maintain a cooperative training spirit throughout practice to enhance a positive learning experience. There is no room for competitive, self-serving, or dangerous practice in Aikido. Work with your partner. Do not block your partner's movements or try to defeat him/her in practice.
- Individuals who engage in reckless practice or display self-serving manners of practice as described above should be asked to stop doing so immediately. Senior practitioners and instructors on the mats are expected to intervene when they observe any inappropriate conduct during practice.
- Focus on the basics in training, especially in the beginning. More dynamic practice naturally comes later.
- Emphasize the correct connection between nage and uke.
- Students should not talk unnecessarily during practice. If fatigued, they should rest rather than hinder the partner's training.

Bukidori

- Generally, avoid letting any weapon fall to the mat. Do not drop or place the captured weapon on the mats between tachi-dori, jo-dori, or tanto-dori techniques in tests; hand it back to uke properly.
- Some techniques are best executed only on one side. Doing the same technique but stepping into the other side might result in being struck by the attacker's weapon.
- Once you have taken a weapon, do not threaten or strike uke with it. (It is acceptable to assume a defensive posture with the weapon before returning it.)

Tantodori

- For shomenuchi and yokomenuchi, uke should hold the tanto so that it protrudes from the bottom of his fist.
- Nage must not touch the edge of the blade.
- Nage should return the weapon to uke correctly. Hand the knife handle first, with nage holding the blunt side of the blade.
- For tanto-tori yokomenuchi gokyo, ura is expected.
- Most tanto-tori entrances should be toward the outside, not inside toward uke's front.
- Nage should be prepared for right- or left-handed attacks.

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- Except for gokyo, standing pins are preferred.

Tachidori

- Different techniques apply when entering on ura or omote sides.
- Nage may be in ai or gyaku hanmi, but should only slide forward as footwork.
- Hand the bokken back horizontally, holding by the handle. Uke should then step back to re-establish proper ma'ai.

Jodori

- Different techniques apply when entering on ura or omote sides.
- Nage may be in ai or gyaku hanmi, but should only slide forward as footwork.
- The jo should be returned vertically, touching the tatami, one hand on top. Uke should accept it from beneath.