

Contributors & Sources

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REI-GI (Etiquette)

It is said that Kendo begins and ends with rei-gi, so a natural place for this guide to start is with a discussion of rei-gi. The physical aspect of rei-gi is represented by the rei as one enters the dojo or shiai-jo, thus starting each practice by the display of respect for the place of practice and its members. The end is by repeating the process thanking everyone for the practice as one leaves the dojo. The natural outgrowth of this is that same manners carry over into all aspects the Kenshi's daily life.

The rei-gi of Kendo is correct behavior in all dealings with other people as you work through your daily activities. In Kendo, a failure in this behavior is a moral failure in the Kenshi's character and training. At the practice level, Kendo is an art form the purpose of which is to defeat one's opponent in a combat of mind against mind and strength against strength. Without the rules of etiquette from beginning to end, the Kendo becomes merely a bashing of the opponent with the only goal to win with any means possible. Kendo with rei-gi remains an art and the opponent is yourself to overcome. With this in mind one is thankful to your partner for having struck you, this exposes your weakness and allows you to improve. Thus practice is an exchange of technique and the Kenshi must always be polite to the person giving you such a gift.

Appearance

Before the first hajime of the exam, the examiners have started to grade the candidate. At each progressive level the Kenshi must have a dignity and presence the exudes that rank for which they are testing. At the lower ranks this may only be the proper wearing of the uniform and equipment. All of us have seen Kenshi who don't wear their uniform and equipment properly. Here are some areas of observation:

The keiko-gi should not be worn in the fashion of a geisha with the nape of the neck exposed or bulging out in the back. After the hakama obi are tied the person needs to reach inside and pull the ends of the keiko-gi across the front to remove all bulges and wrinkles from the back.

The hakama should be the right length with the hem lower in the front and a little higher in the back and crossing at the ankle bone. The koshi-ita should not be hanging loosely, but fit tightly and flatly against the small of the back. The obi should be tied in a square knot and the ends tucked into the obi along the waist at the hips. The hakama pleats should be straight as they represent the samurai code of ethics. Jin (humanity), Gi (justice), Rei (courtesy), Chi (knowledge) and Shin (trust).

The tenugui should be tied on the head so that there is no part flapping out of the back of the men like a chicken tail. Neither should the tenugui be so low on the forehead that it is visible through the men-gane. There should not be an extra tenugui folded up inside the men in the chin area, a special pad is made to be placed inside the men to take up space on a men that is too large. Often children have a men that is too large for the size of their head and should use a pad. The special pad not only provides extra protection for the child on the top of the head but eliminates the unsightly situation of the tenugui in the chin area which often falls out during keiko.

The men should have the himo tied in the proper bow knot (cho-musubi) and be in straight lines as if one cord rather than look as though a fishnet has been cast upon the persons head. The length of the ends and the loops of the bow knots should all be the same and not exceed 40 centimeters.

The upper do himo should be tied with the ends tucked inside and not hanging down the front of the mune. The lower doh himo should be horizontal and tied in a bow knot (cho-musubi).

The tare obi should be flat, run across the koshi-ita in the back and not bulging under the odare in the front.

The kote should not have frayed himo. Lastly the Kenshi should stand tall, straight and walk with dignity. These are the basics before the match even starts.

JI-KEIKO

During the ji-geiko phase of the examination the following points are observed by the examiners:

Is the beginning rei to the opponent done properly, is the shinai at sage-to during the rei and at tai-to with thumb on the tsuba as each Kenshi advances onto the court.

The footwork as they advance onto the court should be smooth sliding steps with the toes down. The draw of the sword should be in the kesa-giri manner as each Kenshi starts their third step. The sonkyo position should be assumed with the back straight and the elbows not touching the thighs.

The ken-sen should be pointed at the opponents nodo. The shinai will have the naka-yui in the proper place 1/3 from the ken-sen and the grip on the tsuka should be with the left hand on the end and the right hand near the tsuba.

At all levels of the examination, the manner of keiko should not be as if one were fighting for shiai points but be proper basic Kendo. During the match, proper footwork, striking and posture must be maintained rather than avoiding being struck by excessive blocking, dodging by bending the waist and bobbing the head. Hanging at tsuba-zeri-ai is not proper but instead maintaining the correct ma-ai of isoku-itto is what the judges are looking for. At each successive level, the ability to know when to attack and recognize the opportunity (chance) of attack will determine your

success in the examination. Just hitting indiscriminately, when you want, rather than when an opening exists, results in poor strikes. This is not to say that you should not be offensive, it is said Kendo is 50% offense and 50% defense, but offense is the bigger half. Defensive hitting is downgraded while even unsuccessful offensive attacks with good spirit that result in ai-uchi (simultaneous strikes by both opponents) will help you pass. Opportunity is created in a number of ways and this study guide will address those methods after finishing this section.

Other factors in ji-geiko are good ki-ai and ki-ken-tai-ichi, seme, sutemi and zanshin which will all be covered in later sections.

KATA

The failure of most candidates kata at lower dan is the lack of practice, the mechanics should be just rote memory. It is very obvious which candidates have neglected kata for long periods of time, hurriedly preparing by practicing only a few times before their test. Logically one would expect that if kata is 50% of the test the candidate would put more effort in to the practice and the learning of kata.

The uchidachi must demonstrate a strong leading of the shitachi, while the shitachi must be able to read the uchidachi's intention. A kodansha performing kata must express a strong and true spirit, reasonable mind and balanced zanshin. The performance shows stroke with drive and spirit, ri-ai, ma-ai, and understands the rhythm of each of the 10 forms.

Starting at 1st-Kyu where just the basic mechanics are needed to Sandan where all the mechanics and the basic fundamentals previously discussed are required, the kata of the candidate should improve at each dan level. At Yondan the kata must demonstrate a better understanding of the hei-ho of Kendo, the rhythm, seme and zanshin. All these things must steadily improve at each succeeding level.

Points that are observed when grading by the examiners:

- Manner before and after the tachi-ai.
- Does the candidate understand all five kamae in 1 through 7 and han-mi and iri-mi in the kodachi kata?
- Does the candidate demonstrate an understanding of me-tsuke and breath control matching with the partner?
- Does the candidate demonstrate an attitude of reality and dignity for the rank requested?
- Does the candidate demonstrate the relationship between uchidachi and shitachi in movement and rhythm?
- Is the timing of the strikes correct, is the shitachi receiving correctly?
- Is the ma-ai correct?
- Is the strike with mono-uchi?
- Are the basic mechanics of the strikes correct? Not too big or too small.

- Is the footwork sliding or just walking? Are the heels touching the ground, flatfooted?
- Does the shitachi demonstrate ki-gurai and does the uchidachi respond to the shitachi's zanshin?

Expectations of Rank

6th-kyu through 2nd-kyu can be awarded at the dojo level depending on the regional federation. Other federations formally test for these grades and some have age restrictions for children. 1st-kyu and above are done through the formal examination process. While it is normal to have both adults and children testing for the same level of kyu there can be a great deal of difference in the basic skills between the adults and children. Most often the children have been doing Kendo much longer and have much better basics than the adults. However when the mental maturity of the adults is factored in this should not be a problem. An experienced examiner will understand this kind of situation and grade accordingly. (see attachments for skill guidelines used by some regionals)

1st-kyu requirements: enter and leave the court properly, strike with ki-ken-tai-ichi, good energy and 1 or 2 yuko-datotsu.

Shodan: same as above with nidan waza included.

Nidan: demonstrate the use of shikake waza, harai waza, debana waza, hiki waza, and oji (oh-ji) waza. Obviously the occasion may not arise to use most of the mentioned waza, but the candidate should show better basics than the Shodan level and be able to use more advanced technique as above. The Kenshi at this level should not be obsessed with the use of waza but start to master the opportunity of attack. Cuts should have good vertical motion with the use of both hands and te-no-uchi.

Sandan: Use seme and ken-sen to initiate attacks and have sharp waza. Particularly the use of oji type of waza should be incorporated in the candidates Kendo.

Yondan: should display very solid Kendo and kamae, display mastery of a variety of techniques, yuko-datotsu, excellent footwork and posture. An attacking kamae full of spiritual energy should be displayed rather than a waiting kamae that reacts to the opponent.

Godan: starting with the Godan examination the candidate must truly exhibit the use of seme and ken-sen to create the moment of attack. Often failure is caused by the candidate doing shiai style of keiko and trying to win points. One must demonstrate the control of the center, the opponents spirit, and mastery of the footwork and shinai. The Kendo must be logical without unnecessary strikes and actions. The strike is followed by zanshin that is true mental alertness.

Rokudan: the same as Godan, but even more, the ri-ai must be demonstrated. Strong control of the center, efficient use of waza and footwork, mental control of the opponent and situation.

Nanadan: all aspects of the previous ranks must be present and an essence of dignity that speaks to quality Kendo. This dignity shows both on and off the court in the persons life.

Kodansha Kendo is not only just winning a strong shiai, strong keiko or beating an opponent in the shinsa. You must express your Kendo with the correct kamae, strong ken-sen, reasonable ma-ai, smooth flowing footwork, body movement and a strong, smooth stroke in your strikes. This must be performed in one rhythm with sharp te-no-uchi.

The Written Exam

The written examination asks the candidate to either discuss or list concepts, principles and even opinions on the various aspects of Kendo. This section will present the material in a discussion and a factual manner. It is up to the candidate to read and absorb the material such that the test questions can be answered.

Kirikaeshi is one of the fundamental learning tools used in Kendo. It contains 5 elements which are described by the metropolitan police as the following: 1. sho-men, 2. tai-atari, 3. four yoko-men forward followed by five backwards, sho-men, 4. four yoko-men forward followed by five backward, 5. sho-men followed by zanshin.

Conceptually kirikaeshi develops strong ki-ai and breath control, large motion, correct cutting angle (ha-suji), correct grip (te-no-uchi), correct footwork (ashi-sabaki) all with ki-ken-tai-ichi. It also limbers the muscles, promotes harmonious action of the whole body and correct ma-ai, follow through with zanshin. Kirikaeshi is said to provide 10 virtues to the attacker and 8 virtues to the receiver. It makes the waza sharp and swift, strengthens the cut, builds stamina, relaxes the stroke and body, improves the motion of the body, improves dexterity and grip, improves the vision of the partner, improves the ma-ai, teaches mental tranquillity, improves observation of the opponent, makes the grip firm yet flexible.

Ma-ai is the interval between the two opponents or partners when practicing Kendo or kata. It is described as 3 intervals:

- Issoku-itto-no-ma-ai (one step-one sword interval). This ma-ai allows you to strike the opponent by taking one step forward and to avoid the opponents attacks by taking one step to the rear or to the side. It is also called uchi-ma or the strike interval. At this interval either party can strike.
- Toii-ma-ai (to-ma) or distant interval is when the opponents are separated such that more than one step is required to strike the opponent. As the opponent moves forward, you have the chance to strike.
- Chikai-ma-ai (chika-ma) or close interval is that distance less than the one step interval. There are many strategies that can be employed from this distance also.

Metsuke or enzan-no-metsuke is the fixing of the eyes or gaze upon the opponent. Enzan-no-metsuke refers to "gazing as though looking at a far mountain". In this sense it is to see everything without focusing on any one object. Basically you fix your gaze at the opponents eyes and read their intention through these windows to their mind. When the opponents eyes fix upon an object such as your sword or a target, their mind becomes "fixed or stopped" and you can then attack.

Ki-ken-tai-itchi or "spirit, sword, & body are one", are the essential elements to a yuko-datotsu (correct strike). This means that all three elements of the strike happen as one element and make the perfect strike. The ability to do this is the ideal which all practice should strive for as a goal.

Zanshin, what is zanshin? The typical answer given is "remaining spirit". This is correct, but there are more meanings and feeling to zanshin than the simple definition implies. It is very simple. However simple does not necessarily mean easy. It is a concept unique to martial arts and it is to the kanji that we must look for further clarification.

The kanji "zan" and "shin" can be read two ways. Kokoro-Wo-Nokosu which means "I consciously do the action of getting my spirit to remain" and Kokoro-Ga-Nokoru which means "My spirit remains unconsciously, spontaneously."

The first definition is appropriate to the beginning Kenshi and the latter to the practiced Kenshi. In effect, it means that if you must think about it, it is too late. The action is always slowed by the thought. If you think about zanshin preceding the cut, the cut will not be good. If you think about zanshin after the cut, an unexpected attack can occur in the split second that you are thinking of keeping your pressure.

Application of the principle of zanshin is most easily exemplified in the Nihon Kendo Kata. In all ten kata the zanshin begins immediately after the cut and continues until both the uchitachi and shitachi returns to chudan-no-kamae. This is stated specifically on ippon-me and nihon-me in Takano Sasaburo's book on Kendo. "Immediately after the cut, if there's any movements, my zanshin says I am ready to strike at any moment, until we both return to chudan."

Therefore, zanshin does not mean only to take the position of jodan-no-kamae after the cut, as in ippon-me, but it is the spirit of zanshin which must be present immediately after such a cut.

Then how can zanshin be identified in shinai Kendo? Does anyone in shinai Kendo normally take or display the stance zanshin emphasizes in the Nihon Kendo Kata? Obviously the answer will be no. It is spiritual awareness that is important, not the final stance, Kokoro-Ga-Nokoru, a naturalness. Zanshin thus means that the Kenshi is always prepared, even when exhausted, even when the match is over, the spirit remains.

Seme as defined in the dictionary is "an attack, the offensive, assault, or siege". In Kendo, it can also be defined as pressure; that is, to pressure the opponent before the attack. There are two kinds of seme: visible and the invisible, or physical and mental, outer or inner. Although it is sometimes difficult to see because even the overt actions occur in split second speed, the visible pressure is easiest to understand. Visible seme occurs when one person pressures an opponent by actual movements with the shinai, feet or the whole body.

Techniques vary. For example in the chudan stance, you pressure your opponent by movement of the shinai as though you are pressuring to strike kote. Instead you strike men because now the men is open because the opponents mind has gone to their kote. Seme occurs during actual shinai contact by the use of harai, uchiotoshi, makiotoshi or some such waza that moves the opponents shinai off center and creates an opening. Thus if I can see with my eyes or feel the shinai putting pressure on my kote or men the intention is already given; the seme is visible. However if the shinai doesn't move, but I can still feel the pressure, then it is invisible seme. The tip of the sword, ken-sen, becomes alive and communicates the seme without any shinai or body movements.

Invisible seme is the most powerful, the seme with the whole body and soul. Invisible seme, kurai-zume, is the ultimate aim of the Kenshi. By gazing (metsuke) into the opponents hara, intentions are detected before any movement and thus the opponent's first move is forced. As in kata, the shitachi always applies the pressure and is never on the defense. The spirit is always ready and a milli-second ahead of the opponent, the opponent moves and is defeated.

Because seme is pressure which creates relationship, especially strong invisible seme, it is related to both sen and zanshin. It is not really separate from sen, but precedes it as sen precedes zanshin. Focused to waza it is reflected in sen. After the attack it is focused in the zanshin.

Mittsu-no-sen or the three attacks. According to Miyamoto Musashi there are three sen:

- Ken-no-Sen, you attack just before the opponent.
- Tai-no-Sen, the opponent attacks first but you strike first and win.
- Tai-Tai-no-Sen, both attack at the same time but your cut is first and wins.

Takano Sasaburo explained the mittsu-no-sen as: Sensen-no-sen or kakari-no-sen: to use seme and then strike the opponent just before he moves when their mind has committed to attack.

Go-no-Sen or Sengo-no-sen or Tai-no-sen: when the opponent has started their technique but the action is not completed. Move effectively avoiding their cut and strike yourself.

Sen or Senzen-no-Sen: when the opponent is in mid-attack deflect it and counter attack.

If you study the strategy of the kata you gain an understanding of mittsu-no-sen.

Related to mittsu-no-sen is San-satsu-no-ho or San-sappo, the 3 methods of killing.

Kill the sword or ken-o-korosu

- To kill the sword is to attack the sword with any number of waza such as uchi-otoshi or harai, in other words sweep it away, shove it aside, hit it down, twist it around, anything to move it out of center.

Kill the waza or waza-o-korosu

- Kill the waza using sen-no-ki to attack the opponent before they can attack you, if they are busy fighting off your attack it is hard to counter attack. It is also to move in and spoil their attack before it even happens by looking inside and seeing their intention. It is also detecting their waza and using the counter waza to it such as men, suriage-men.

Kill the spirit or ki-o-korosu

- Kill the ki or mental balance by such forceful seme that they become frightened. Use your strong ki to kill their ki, invisible seme, mentally cut the opponent's mind with your mind.

All these methods lead to the four sicknesses; fear, doubt, surprise and confusion. Fear by weakening the opponents mind by your strong ki.

Doubt causes the opponent to become tight and hesitant. If you kill their waza they will begin to doubt their ability to succeed.

Weaken their mind by doing the unexpected.

Confuse them by changing the rhythm and timing of the match, this will throw off their comfort zone, their natural mind (hei-jo-shin). Hei-jo-shin is the normal calm state of mind that allows one to make accurate decisions.

To accomplish these things one must have excellent footwork. Ashi-sabaki or footwork is broken down into four types:

- Ayumi-ashi, which is essentially normal walking used to cover a lot of ground quickly.
- Okuri-ashi or the basic Kendo footwork of pushing off with the left foot positioned in the rear and sliding the right foot forward simultaneously, followed by snapping the left foot forward to achieve the original spacing of the feet.
- Hiraki-ashi or diagonal footwork is moving in any direction but forward or backward with basic Kendo footwork.
- Tsugi-ashi or de-ashi is to bring the left foot up parallel to the right foot and then step forward in an attack.

All of the footwork is performed with suri-ashi, sliding motion.

Waza are categorized as either oji (oh-ji) waza or shikake waza. The actual techniques such as suriage, harai, nuki etc. fall into one of these two categories.

- Shikake waza is further defined by whether there is blade contact or no blade contact. In shikake waza you take the initiative through your seme and create an opening and attack.
- In oji waza the opponent initiates the attack and you counter see the section on mittsu-no- sen.

When you attack it must be with the mind set of sute-mi or to have no care for your life. To throw away your life so that you have no fear of losing but total commitment to the attack.

These discussions cover most but not all of the material of the written test.