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SHIDOKAN KENDO AND IAIDO CLUB  
CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY  
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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the wonderful world of kendo. May this be the first time you try physical activity or you are a professional athlete / martial arts expert, you will find kendo a challenging and rewarding experience. We are very happy to count you among us. Welcome to the club.

Kendo is not easy. Physically, with all the blisters, aches, breaking the old habits; mentally, with all the repetition, concentration, and the depth in it. From past experience we noticed that most newcomers quit before even getting a taste of it. Hope this will not be your case. Practice, persevere, join the 10 million other people worldwide practicing kendo, and soon you will proudly call yourself **KENDOKA**.

All the best! And good luck in your quest.

## 2. BASIC VOCABULARIES

During a kendo practice you will encounter quite a few Japanese words. Here are the most common ones, and we encourage you to master them ASAP.

Sensei	Teacher / Instructor	Senpai	(Sempai)
Upperclassmen			
Dojo	Training hall	Shomen	Front or Center of Dojo
Numbers			
Ichi	One	Roku	Six
Ni	Two	Shichi (nana)	Seven
San	Three	Hachi	Eight
Shi (yon)	Four	Kyu	Nine
Go	Five	Jyu	Ten
Seiza	Sit on your knees		
Mokusou	Meditation		
Rei	Bow		
Onegai Ittashimasu / Onegaishimasu	Greeting before practice.		
It could be translated into "please teach me", or "please help me to learn".			
Domo Arigatou Gozaimashita	Thank you very much		
Shinai	The bamboo sword		
Bogu	The protective armour		
Dogi	Training uniform		
Gi	Upper uniform	Hakama	Lower uniform
Kote, men, do	The target area, respectively wrist, head, torso.		

Seiretsu	Line up
Hajime	Start
Yame	Stop
Keiko	Practice / training
Suburi	Cutting practice
Sankyudo	Three step cutting practice
Kiai	Call out your target / concentrate your energy
Kirikaeshi	Basic cut and block exercise
Motodachi	Person receiving the hits

There are more, but this should be enough for now. Should you have any questions, please ask your Sensei and Sempai. *GANBATTE!!*

### 3. ETIQUETTE

Etiquette is the fundamental and the most important aspect of any martial arts. It shows respect towards the dojo, sensei, sempai, colleagues, and yourself. Disrespect will likely result in insult, anger, and injury. Study them, and put them into practice thoroughly, without exaggerating them.

#### *i. Rei*

There are two types: standing and sitting. In either case keep your neck and spine straight, and bend from your hips.

Standing rei is performed when you enter or exit the dojo, when you greet other people, and each time you face a new opponent.

In standing rei, keep your feet together, always maintain eye contact, loosen your elbows, bow forward to an angle of 15 degrees (colleagues and friends, keep eye contact) or 30 degrees (shomen, sensei, or sempai, break eye contact). Do take adequate time before getting up.

Sitting rei is performed at the beginning and end of class, or to show greater respect before or after the class.

In sitting rei, sit in seiza, bring your left then your right hand in front of you to make a triangle with your index fingers and thumbs, bow down as to bring your nose inside the triangle. Do take adequate time before getting up. Please never get up before Sensei.

ii. Your *shinai* is an imitation of a real sword. It allows us to practice kendo without killing each other. Do treat it like a real sword. Please maintain it in an impeccable condition. Don't play with it, don't throw it around, don't walk or jump over it, never point it to other people for fun, don't lean on it, and don't use it to poke things around.

- iii. When you move around the dojo, always pass behind anyone sitting in seiza. When you rotate around Sensei or Sempai or other colleague during practice, always go around them from behind, and quickly.
- iv. If you are late for class, do join in quietly. Do a quick warm-up, and quietly join at the end of the line.
- v. Always maintain tranquility of spirit. Keep emotional outburst to zero. All verbal and physical abuse will not be tolerated.

Do not hesitate to ask your Sensei or Sempai if you have any questions.

#### **4. THINGS TO REMEMBER IN THE DOJO**

Fortunately, we have a great gymnasium to practice in. Unfortunately, we only have an hour and a half per week. We need more members like you in order to convince the university to grant us more time. But meanwhile here are some tips to remember to make the most out of the class.

- i. Always come early and be ready.
- ii. Always be attentive of what Sensei says.
- iii. Always respond promptly and loudly when addressed.
- iv. Always ask for permission before you take a rest.
- v. Always listen, watch, and practice.
- vi. Do not let Sensei or Sempai come and get you. Line up after them.
- vii. No idle conversation during class.

#### **5. BASIC WARM-UP**

Warm-up is very important in order to prevent injuries. Work your way from head to toes. Here are the basic warm-up exercises we do before each class.

Jump and jumping Jacks. Head up and down, left and right, half circles. Shoulders, small circles backward and forward, big circles backward and forward. Waist rotations, forward and backward. Calf stretches, free lower body stretches, knee rotations. Hands open and close.

Find the time to do them again right after the class.

With your shinai, do wrist rotations, and suburi.

## 6. KENDO BASICS

Solid basics will allow you to advance with more ease. It is difficult to correct bad habits once you get them. Master the following basics correctly and you will be able to wield your sword as it should be wielded. As you improve your skills you will come back to fine tune your basics.

### *Grip*

How do you hold your shinai?

If you hold it correctly you will notice a blister appearing at the base of your little finger. If you do not hold it correctly you can get blisters virtually anywhere in your hands. That hurts.

Hold your shinai at the tip with your left hand, firmly with your 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> fingers, loosely with the rest.

Leave a space of about a fist, and hold the shinai with your right hand, firmly with 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> fingers, loosely with the rest.

You will notice a triangle forming between your index and your thumb on both hands. Bring your hands inward in order to align the peaks of the triangles with the string (tsuru) of your shinai.

Keep your fingers and arms relaxed when you move your shinai. Briskly squeeze your grip at the same time as your hits, and relax immediately.

### *Chudan no kamae*



There are many kamae, or stances, in kendo. Chudan no kamae means middle stance. It is the stance best suited for balanced offence and defence. It is also the basic stance you need to master before learning other advanced stances.

In kendo, high ranks and low ranks all dress the same. One cannot determine one's level by looking at his/her uniform. But guess what. Your kamae gives it away. So practice hard. Here are the important tips to remember when you take this stance.

- i. Right foot in front, both feet parallel to each other, left toes at the level of right heel, both feet at about a foot apart.
- ii. Left heel slightly off the floor. NB. Your left heel should never touch the floor. Don't lift it too high.
- iii. Right heel is very lightly on the floor. Your weight is at the front of your feet.
- iv. Right knee is comfortably bent. Left knee is straight, but not locked, always ready to move.
- v. Spine is straight. Your head is straight. Tuck your chin in. Feel as if a string is pulling your head towards the ceiling.
- vi. Shoulders back and down. Relax your shoulders and your elbows.
- vii. With the grip discussed earlier, your left hand is about a fist away from your abdomen, 1.5 inch below your belly button to be precise. That should bring your left thumb to the level of your belly button.
- viii. Imagine an opponent at the distance far enough from you. The tips of your shinai and his/her shinai are barely touching.
- ix. The tip of your shinai is at the level of your opponent's throat. If you extend a line from your shinai, it should end at your opponent's left eye or between the eyebrows.
- x. Look as far as you can forward. Look at a far away mountain.

It seems very awkward in the beginning, but with practice this stance will become very comfortable. Don't get discouraged.

### *Footwork*

Many people think that kendo is done with arms. Partly right, mostly wrong. You need a strong footwork in order to win. What good is a super fast hyper strong cut if you cannot reach your opponent?

There are many types of footwork used in kendo, but only one we practice in the beginning. Here are the important tips.

- i. Never cross your feet.
- ii. Always move the forward foot first. Right foot first when moving forward or right, left foot first when moving backward or left.
- iii. Never drag your second foot. Always bring it to the original place relative to the other ASAP.
- iv. When moving forward or right, it is as if your left foot is pushing you forward or right. When moving backward or left, it is as if your right foot is pushing you backward or left.
- v. Always keep your feet parallel.
- vi. Keep your body straight at all times. No swaying left and right, no ups and downs. Move your body like a ghost carried around by your feet.

Always try to maintain a proper chudan no kamae while practicing your footwork.

### *Cuts*

There are altogether eight valid target areas in kendo. You only need to learn three and the rest will follow. They are called Men (shomen, head), Kote (migi kote, wrist), and Do (migi do, torso).

In all of your cuts, remember and respect the following.

- i. Relax your shoulders at all times.
- ii. Left hand is for power. Right hand is for steering. Do not use your right arm to move your shinai. Your right hand can assist your left, not more.
- iii. Squeeze your grip at the moment of impact.
- iv. Look far away. Do not look at where you hit.
- v. Always bring your shinai over your head.
- vi. Always bring it high enough so that your hands do not block your vision.
- vii. When your shinai is over your head, point the tip towards the sky. NEVER drop the tip of your shinai below horizontal.

**Men** It is a vertical strike to the center of the head. At the end of your cut, both your arms should be extended forward, both hands at the middle of your body, right hand levelled with your right shoulder, left hand levelled with your sternum.

**Kote** It is a vertical strike to your opponent's right wrist. At the end of your cut, both arms should be extended forward and down, both hands at the level of your abdomen, at least three fists away from your belly button. Never cut below horizontal.

**Do** It is an angled strike to your opponent's right torso, right below the 12<sup>th</sup> rib. It is also the hardest cut to grasp. Just remember to keep your left hand in the center, guide your cut with your right hand, and keep facing the opponent until he/she is hit. Ask Sensei or Sempai for more details.

Your shinai weights only a little over one pound, but it tends to get very heavy. Don't worry, that's quite normal. In the beginning, if you find it gets too heavy, take a rest. Once you get more comfortable with it, try to keep up with the pace. Eventually it will become like an extra limb. "An extension of your arm", as Sensei puts it.

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## 7. SHINAI MAINTENANCE

Your shinai is a consumable good. It won't last forever. It usually lasts between one month to two years depending on your practice and maintenance level.

An impeccable condition of your shinai is essential to prevent unwanted, sometimes grave, even life-threatening accidents. Please respect the following guidelines in order to keep your shinai in a good working condition.

- i. Check your shinai for cracks, splinters, loose strings, broken leather parts, etc, before, during, and after each class.
- ii. Stop practicing immediately when you notice the above problems. Correct the problem by either asking your Sempai or replacing your shinai before rejoining the class.
- iii. Take out the splintered or cracked area, and sand them smooth.
- iv. If the break is too big for sanding, you need a new shinai.
- v. Apply oil on the surface of the shinai or leave it in a humid place (eg. Bathroom) occasionally to help its flexibility.
- vi. Manipulate with care when maintaining your shinai. Some splinters are so small that you don't notice them until they are under your skin. That hurts.

## 8. WEARING A UNIFORM

Kendo uniform, called *dogi*, is composed of two parts: *Gi* and *Hakama*. Everyone should properly wear them during practice. In the beginning we prefer to wait a few months before starting to wear them. This is because of the high drop out rate. A decent dogi costs about \$100 to \$300. It is a big commitment for people coming to 2-3 practices then stops. Meanwhile, once you know that you want to continue practicing kendo, then do not hesitate to invest. Wearing the uniform is a must, hence you do not need permission before wearing them.

## 9. KENDO SECRETS

Now is the time to reveal the secret on how to get better faster. **THERE IS NO SHORTCUT**. Sorry. Nevertheless, you will notice that some people improve faster or slower than others. Some of it must be related to factors you cannot change, like being a junior fencing champion, or a junior couch potato champion. **BUT!!** Most of it can be controlled. The tricks are repetition, repetition, and repetition.

- i. When Sensei teaches you something, it may sound obvious but the real jewel is deeper than you think. Don't take Sensei's teaching lightly. Keep his teaching in mind when you practice.
- ii. One practice a week is not enough to improve at a reasonable pace. That's why all your Sempais do homework at home. Try to follow the recommended daily homework (paragraph 12).
- iii. A vast quantity of kendo information is available through the internet. Surf the sites, watch videos, read articles. Much details about everything discussed earlier is in the internet. Finding where is also part of your homework.
- iv. Get your dogi ASAP.
- v. Be patient. The first two semesters might get boring. It is repetition after repetition of things you may think you've mastered. It is to get you ready for the advanced practice. Solid basic is mandatory in order to advance your level in advanced practice. So, please be patient.
- vi. Do not haste in imitating your Sempais. Imitating without proper preparation is the surest way of getting bad habits.
- vii. Persevere. People who quit before they get a taste of real kendo are like people who only read menus in a fancy restaurant and leave.
- viii. Try to come to every class, and participate actively. You may not notice it, but Sensei and Sempai are watching you in every class, even if they don't talk to you for six months.
- ix. This one is unofficial. From past experience, Sensei will not give you special attention unless you show your motivation and your perseverance and your interest during keiko. He will not go to you. You must come to him.
- x. Try to participate in free practice. Time and location may vary, but we do have extra practices here and there. Keep your eyes and ears sharp, and bother your Sempais. Onegaishimasu!!

## **10. ADVANCED PRACTICE: A PREVIEW**

If you persevered through the above points, you will surely notice a change in your skills. It could be anything, from being able to catch up with the whole practice without rest, to being able to do what Sensei asks you to do. It could take anywhere between 3 months to 18 months (maybe longer if you've missed a few too many classes). Then, maybe, one of your Sempai will approach you with a big, heavy, stinky set of armour. It is called BOGU, literally meaning protective armour. Well, CONGRATULATIONS!! You made it!! You've passed the test and are now ready to learn kendo.

Kendo, the way of the sword, is practiced between two people. The idea is to kill or disable your opponent before he / she does it to you. That's why we wear the bogu, so that we don't die or get crippled during keiko. You've proven yourself. You are now ready to wear protection so that you can unleash your real skills against others. You may have to go through a small 'initiation', but it's totally worth it. Well, CONGRATULATIONS!!

Bogu practice is a whole new ball game. You have to get used to the extra weight, narrower and suffocating vision, uneasy shoulder movements, intolerable pressure from your Sempais, etc. Things you've mastered earlier will seem more difficult to do. But don't worry. You already have the basics by now, so you will get used to it very quick.

Once you have your bogu on, you will probably smile looking back at this little text. Everything is so obvious. At this stage, you won't need such a guide to help your training. Let's train hard, together. The world is wide and challenges are everywhere. From here, it is a lifelong quest. And we are in it together.

## 11. GRADING SYSTEM

As mentioned earlier, there is no way of telling one's grade by looking at their uniform. In kendo, we do not wear coloured belts. But there is a grading system, a ladder you will climb up as you improve your skills. It goes from 9<sup>th</sup> kyu to 8<sup>th</sup> dan.

The following is an approximate equivalent of your level.

### Junior (13 and under)

9 kyu	white belt
8 kyu	white - yellow belt
7 kyu	yellow belt
6 kyu	yellow - orange belt
5 kyu	orange belt

### Senior (14 and up)

5kyu	orange belt	
4kyu	green belt	
3 kyu	blue belt	the bogu level
2 kyu	red belt	
1 kyu	brown belt	
shodan (1 <sup>st</sup> dan)	BLACK BELT	

Usually, you wear a bogu when you reach 3 kyu. Most dojos do their own grading from 9 kyu to 2 kyu. Then, from 1 kyu and up, everyone has to go to the National Grading Committee. In our case, that will be either in Toronto in December, or Quebec City in July.

In Shidokan, we do not grade people. Rather, we wait until one is ready for 1 kyu, then send that person to the National Grading. Remember, Sensei and Sempai are watching you. Sensei will tell you when you are ready.

In Shidokan we follow two traditions. A - We do not rush through grading. B - You will be ready for the level above the one you will be grading for.

A - No need to rush through grading. Grading is just a number you cannot translate. Kendo is a lifelong training and you have plenty of time to reach the maximum grade available. Rushing through the grading can only make you arrogant and satisfied with the current level.

B - When Sensei sends you for 1 kyu, that is because you are good enough to be shodan. When Sensei sends you for shodan, that is because you are good enough to be 2 dan. That is the tradition. No one from our club fails. A black belt is not a trophy. It is rather a personal promise to go higher and higher.

Don't worry about the grading. No one in the club boasts about their grade. No one in the club wants you to boast about your grade. Be humble, patient, and perseverant.

Just a reminder to all of you who practiced martial arts before; a black belt, namely shodan, does not mean you have mastered the art. It merely means that you have what it takes to learn the art. It is a lifelong quest. Stick around until you become a true master recognized by all.

## 12. RECOMMENDED DAILY HOMEWORK

'What can I do at home to improve my kendo?' This is a question everyone will ask. But how many will do them?

'My ceiling is too low'. There are lots of excuses, but there are lots of possibilities out there.

Make your priorities. You are a student. Your main priority is to study. There is no doubt about it. All of the best kendokas throughout the world are people who are also very successful in their society. It may not seem likely right now, but what you learn in kendo is also very useful in real life.

When you do have some spare time, do practice the following.

- i. FOOTWORK! Take chudan no kamae, keep your feet parallel, move forward, backward, right, left, and repeat.
- ii. Relax your shoulders.
- iii. Look at a far away mountain.
- iv. Go outdoor, or if you are indoor sit in seiza, and do suburi: men, kote, and do.
- v. Do some research over the internet.

There is no recommended time frame, but somewhere between 20 to 60 minutes a day seems reasonable. You are responsible for your own training. Good luck!!

## 13. CONCLUSION

We are very happy to count you among us. We want new people to get better and better because we want new people to come and beat us. Kendo is not easy. But it surely is addictive. Persevere, practice hard, and please, do come and kick our @\$ so that we can persevere and practice harder. We are in it together. Kendo is a lifelong learning process, and we learn from beginners and masters alike.

On behalf of Shidokan Kendo and Iaido club, proud member of the Canadian Kendo Federation, proud member of the International Kendo Federation, we wish you GOOD LUCK! And WELCOME TO THE CLUB!!

Senseis and Sempais of the Shidokan Kendo and Iaido Club.