

Preparation for a first kyu test and early stages of shodan.

The first kyu test is your chance to demonstrate a variety of techniques and ukemi. There is a wide selection of techniques to choose from. Some are required, but most are of your choosing.

Your main focus should be on the following:

- good posture allowing you to move from your center with relaxed shoulders and mind.
- the basic throwing techniques - see Kihon Waza below.
- setting your personal goals and developing your philosophy in Aikido.

As nage, you should demonstrate stability and accuracy in basic throws with awareness of your body position in relation to uke. Use a variety of entries, (irimi, tenkan, enten, tenshin) to move into shikaku (the safe place), take uke's balance and perform the throw in that order.

Kokyu-Ryoku = breath power. Use it for your throws. In Aikido we do not use kiai or yelling but we do have our breath power. Breathe out with your throws in a controlled way as you move your center forward into the throw. Your connection with uke's center is critical.

Hara = center. Using your center means that your core harnesses your energy which then radiates out through the joints of your legs down into the mat and through your upper body and arms into your partner's center. Your core includes your abdominal, back and hip muscles all working in unison. From your core, use the rest of the joints in your body with correct extension and timing to propel uke away from you. If your core is compromised by bad posture, lack of extension or poor timing, then your technique, your safety and uke's safety will be compromised. Good posture means that your head is above your hips, your shoulders are relaxed and your legs have elasticity in them. Shizen tai posture or natural body posture allows you to protect yourself as you move with your center into shikaku, take uke's balance and use your center to throw uke safely out and away from you.

Ma-ai is the distance between uke and nage. Start with proper ma-ai. (uke needs to take a step in order to reach nage) Your hands should be extended toward your partner's center not limp at your sides. End each throw with proper ma-ai so you can use Aikido techniques as uke continues to attack. A good grappler will take you down if you throw without establishing proper ma-ai with your throws. If you do not establish ma-ai you should pin uke to keep from having to resort to kicking, punching or injuring uke to stop the attack. Your Aikido technique should allow you to keep using Aikido to stop uke's violent behavior. If you have to resort to striking or injuring uke, your Aikido is not effective as a means of non-violent self defense. Throw out to establish good ma-ai or pin!

Timing of the throw:

Sen No Sen: moving with uke's movement. (this is how we usually practice)

Sen Sen No Sen: controlling uke's movement and attack by moving first. (most effective for randori)

Ko No Sen: catching up with uke's movement and then leading uke. (moving off the line to blend)

Techniques:

Kihon Waza: Basic techniques include:

Katame Waza: pinning or joint locking techniques include ikkyo, nikyo, sankyo, yonkyo and gokyo.

Nage Waza: throws include iriminage, shihonage, kotegaeshi, kaitennage and tenchi nage.

Oyo Waza: other techniques derived from the basic techniques.

Practicing for the test:

Practice with a variety of partners. Practice a variety of techniques from a variety of attacks. Include attacks not on the test sheet, like ushiro attacks and katatetori both ai hanmi and gyaku hanmi. You should know all techniques required for the 5th kyu test through 2nd kyu test.

Choosing techniques for your test: Of the six techniques for each attack, include at least three basic throwing techniques. Do not use ikkyo through gokyo except for henka waza in which you change it to a throwing technique. You may use kotegaeshi as a pinning technique to give your uke a quick breather. You may also pin with shihonage if you go down to your knees for the throw.

Please use the following techniques at least once on your test:

tai otoshi	ko goshi
maki otoshi	suribe goshi
uki otoshi	hajiki goshi
kata hiki otoshi	koshi garuma

Tanto tori: Practice techniques from a variety of attacks. Take the tanto away from uke during the shihonage throw. You may also take it away during kotegaeshi. When you demonstrate techniques, especially gokyo, make sure your hand is not liable to be cut by the blade. Except for gokyo and ude hishige nikyo, use standing pins to take the tanto away from uke's grasp.

Weapons: You need to know jo and bokken suburi and you will demonstrate the 35 count jo kata on your 1st kyu test. Even though tachi tori and jo tori are not required on the first kyu test, you should start becoming familiar with jo tori and tachi tori in preparation for shodan.

Randori: Make your first throw a good one. Move towards your ukes. Do not give them time to plan an attack. Use a variety of entries to get into shikaku, take their balance and finish each throw before going on to the next uke. Use a variety of throws, especially the basic ones. Use a big portion of the mat. Breathe! Keep your shoulders and your mind relaxed. You'll have 3 or 4 attackers. Throw one at the others to give your self more time and control over the situation. Blend in with uke's attack and use the energy it provides. Don't crash or push against uke. It takes too much time and wastes energy. As uke, get up quickly and be aware of what's going on around you so you don't get hurt.

Off the mat: Some find it helpful to write down the techniques for each attack. Bring the list to practice and amend it as you go. You may also visualize the techniques you want to do for each attack. Find a quiet time without distractions and try to visualize yourself doing the technique in your mind. Watch yourself do the technique the way you want to do it. Watch uke get up from that throw and come at you again with the same attack. Do a different technique in your mind keeping your posture, entering into shikaku, taking uke's balance and completing the throw. Repeat this visualization process with six techniques from one attack. Go through your entire test in your mind.

Video help: We can use the video camera to help you see the real you performing as nage and uke. You can watch yourself on your phone or computer. This will help you see the strengths and

weaknesses in your technique and ukemi This process can help each of us learn how to take criticism humbly and give criticism constructively.

Ukemi: Your ukemi is just as important if not more important for self defense as being able to do a technique. Although an important aspect of ukemi is to prevent injury, ukemi's primary purpose is to allow nage to perform a technique "without hesitation". That is to say that nage has confidence in uke's ability to absorb the power of the throw and nage does not need to slow down in order for uke to keep up with the throw. This is a goal to reach for. You are not there yet with your ukemi.

Please note: "without hesitation" does not mean that uke stops attacking so that nage can ignore proper ma-ai to do a technique. Uke is not one of those weighted inflatable plastic clowns that keeps coming back up every time you push it over. Uke attacks and continues to attack throughout the interaction. Ukes pay attention to ma-ai and protect themselves while attacking, getting thrown and standing with the toes up. After the fall, uke gets up using the center with hands directed at nage's center, looking for ways to attack. In this sense, both uke and nage should try to re-establish proper ma-ai with the fall/throw respectively. If nage throws uke down at the feet, uke might attack or retreat. It is unrealistic for nage to expect that uke will always retreat. The outcome will depend on the situation, the relationship if any between uke and nage, the anger involved and their relative physical sizes. Remember also, that nage is not always the good guy in the real world. As uke, you can re-establish good ma-ai with your ukemi by using nage's energy and power to propel yourself away from nage.

Attacks: Uke should demonstrate proper attacks with good ma-ai and protection of the center. Pay attention to Aikido as budo. As you attack, look for an opening or try to create an opening in nage's defense. For example, during the ai hanmi katatetori attack, uke should grasp the outside of nage's wrist not the inside of the wrist which could be considered a sacrifice. As you get close to nage with your attack, watch for openings in your defense and move to protect yourself. Your center line is most vulnerable. If you stop attacking, nage can hit you or walk away or pull out a weapon. You don't know what nage will do, so you need to keep watching, moving and attacking to protect yourself.

Absorbing Nage's Power: As uke, maintaining your connection with nage's center is critical to be able to absorb nage's power. This takes flexibility of body and mind. You cannot predict what throw nage will perform. As nage performs a throw, try to keep your center connected to their center. This will help you absorb nage's power and not be injured. If you lose that connection, you could land flat on your back or on your shoulder or even on your head. Keep your posture as long as you can by keeping elasticity in your legs and upper body. Move your feet to keep them under you as long as possible. Keep your posture in order to keep your feet from getting stuck on the mat. Keep visual contact so that you don't turn your back to nage. Watch what nage is doing to you so you can react. Try to maintain a connection and follow nage's movement looking for a weakness in the movement. If there is none, follow through to the throw, absorb the power of the throw so you can re-establish your ma-ai. Take the fall with fluidity in your movement, get up with good posture using your core muscles. Your hands should be directed at nage's center as soon after you hit the mat as possible. Assess your situation and prepare to attack nage.

Your Test: Most important, please have fun training and practicing for your test. Working together with one another toward mutual goals is one of the pleasures we get to cherish in practicing Aikido.

1ST KYU: 300 hrs. of training since last test and instructor's permission

1. Hanmi-Handachi: Ushiro Ryokatatori -- 5 techniques 1: kokyunage 2: hitoe iriminage 3: jujinage
4: sankyo to tai otoshi 5: kotegaeshi 6: _____
2. Katatori Menuchi -- 5 techniques 1: irimi nage 2: shihonage 3: kotegaeshi
4: _____ 5: _____ 6: uki otoshi (optional)
3. Yokomenuchi -- 5 techniques 1: irimi nage 2: shihonage 3: kotegaeshi
4: _____ 5: _____ 6: kata hiki otoshi (optional)
4. Morotetori -- 5 techniques 1: irimi nage 2: shihonage 3: kotegaeshi
4: _____ 5: _____ 6: juji nage (optional)
5. Shomenuchi -- 5 techniques 1: irimi nage 2: shihonage 3: kotegaeshi
4: _____ 5: _____ 6: tai otoshi (optional)
6. Ryotetori -- 5 techniques 1: irimi nage 2: shihonage 3: kotegaeshi
4: _____ 5: _____ 6: maki otoshi (optional)
7. Tsuki -- 5 techniques 1: irimi nage 2: shihonage 3: kotegaeshi
4: _____ 5: _____ 6: uki otoshi (optional)

8. Koshinage -- any 5 attacks tsuki: _____ shomenuchi: _____
ryotetori: _____ yokomenuchi: _____ ushiroryokatatori: _____
morotetori: _____ ushirokubishime: _____

(try to do 5 different koshinages from: o goshi; ko goshi; hajiki goshi; koshi garuma; shiho goshi; suribe goshi; uki goshi; ukashi goshi; kote hineri koshi nage; maki goshi.

9. Tantotori -- 5 attacks tsuki: _____ shomenuchi: _____
yokomenuchi: gokyo omote blade down yokomenuchi: shiho nage omote blade up shomenuchi: kotegaeshi ura blade down

gyaku yokomenuchi: sankyo omote
blade up

10. Randori -- 3 ukes

11. 35 count jo kata