



## **Kendo Grading Requirements**

The following fine points should be considered when examining but please keep in mind that these are a `wish list' only, and a single miss shouldn't be leaped upon to justify a harsh decision. None of us, I'm afraid, could bear intense scrutiny on every single point set out below.

*Of far more use is your judgement, formed through experience, of the overall picture of the applicant's kendo. Look for the skill not just for the errors.*

In the following text, 'appropriate' means exactly that; appropriate for the grade examined. In other words don't expect more than the grade requires or more than you could reasonably expect from the age and fitness level of the applicant. If we apply the requirements below without considering age and infirmity then none but the super fit could ever attempt a grading. **This is obviously wrong!** Please try to consider effort, commitment and depth of practice as well as just technique. In Japan 1st to 3rd dan is regarded as 'low level kendo' and even 4th and 5th dan is seen as only the first step into higher level kendo. Remember that due to the ever increasing time between dan examinations, the technical difference between first and second dan will be far closer than the gap between third and fourth dan and that, quite reasonably, the pass rate is likely to decrease as the level gets higher. Lastly, to sit on a grading panel should be seen as a privilege and not an imposition. Please take it seriously. Be modest and natural, lounging in your chair, eating or drinking during the grading just looks unprofessional. You owe it to the examinees to be alert, tidily dressed, sober, confident and sure of what you are looking for.

## **Shodan**

Expect to see the initial rei with the left arm extended (teito), after rei assume taito posture placing the thumb onto the tsuba. Judge where to rei in order to reach the sonkyo position in three steps with the shinai tips just touching. Clothing should be clean and pressed, not necessarily new. Tenugui should be worn in such a way that it doesn't slip down during the grading. Check to see that the men himo are untied properly at the end of the bout and that the men is not just slipped off, the inside of the men should be wiped before the face. Have the examinees entered the dojo with clean feet?

### **Show correct ashi sabaki and ki ken tai for shodan level**

Note if the examinee steps forward as he stands from sonkyo and moves in a way conducive to making an attack and not in a crab-wise direction. Look for a flat left heel, especially moving backwards on the kendo kata or on the backward passage of the kiri kaeshi, or the left foot splayed out. Check that the left foot is not moved as the shinai is raised, this will indicate that the left foot is not the motive force. The cuts should coordinate reasonably well with the stamp of the right foot.



## **Kendo Grading Requirements**

### **Hold the shinai correctly, cut with control, cut on target**

See if the hands are holding the shinai from on top, of course in kata we can see the grip easily but with kote on it is essential to look at the position of the elbows as the arms are raised to give an indication of whether the correct grip is employed. Left hand on the end of the tsuka and right hand near the tsuba - especially when cutting backwards on the kirikaeshi.

It's usually easy to see if the cuts are controlled but look especially for missed kote cuts that finish at knee height, also look carefully at the last backwards cut on the kirikaeshi and note the position of the right arm. The right arm and the angle of the shinai will also show if a cut is correctly pushed, "clubbed" or "bounces" up too high and also if it hit the men gane or the men buton.

### **Be eager to initiate attacks**

Beginners will often imitate their instructors who may often be using ojiwaza or inviting attacks (sasoi). This may be understandable from the instructor's point of view but is not a good way for beginners to train as they start to rely on trickery. Hikiwaza - yes, nukiwaza - not at this stage.

### **Show reasonable kirikaeshi - attacking side only**

The hardest thing about the kirikaeshi is if the opponent can't control the distance and they don't work as a pair (which is quite probable with the chance system that gradings are). However, here is the best chance to see the ki ken tai, the cutting action, the footwork etc unhampered by nerves and the desire to put on a good show for the panel, so please pay a lot of attention to the attacking side of the kirikaeshi. Pay careful attention to the aim of the cuts, are they to the head or to the receiver's shinai?

### **Correct chudan kamae and issoku itto ma ai**

The shinai tip should be kept in the centre and not allowed to wander around. We should encourage techniques that are planned from toi maai and executed from issoku itto maai and not planned from issoku itto maai and executed from chika maai. Obviously there is an overlap between this and the next requirement, without the correct maai a correct strike cannot be made. Please pay attention to the maai on striking.

### **Correct cutting**

Look at the position of the left hand (in the centre) and of the height of the right arm (extended from the shoulder) on men cuts. Left hand must come above eye height when raising the shinai for a men cut. It is unlikely that do cuts can be made as a shikake waza at this level (if it's an oji do then it's more likely to be a panic reaction on being caught half asleep). Look for the position of the elbows on kote cuts that will indicate if the grip is correct or not.



## **Kendo Grading Requirements**

### **Good kiai, posture and ki ken tai**

Kiai shouldn't only be heard when making a strike or thrust but also for building energy and confidence. Posture shouldn't be confused with posing, putting on an act just looks stiff and wooden. Look for changes in direction to indicate good balance, i.e. when starting to cut backwards in kirikaeshi after the tai attari.

### **Show effective zanshin**

Two big indications of poor zanshin are:

- Turning after a men attack with the arms already in chudan kamae - compounded clockwise instead of anti- clockwise and;
- Passing through to the left after a kote attack - compounded by holding chudan kamae while doing so.

### **Make at least one good point with strong spirit in each shiai**

A good point in each shiai is, I believe, enough, provided that the point is clean and clear, and not a 60-40 "just about" kind of ippon.

### **Show the appropriate kata level for shodan**



## Kendo Grading Requirements

### Nidan

- as above and in addition

#### **Show physical agility and balance, fluid footwork**

To make effective nidan waza the wrists must be powerful and not the arms, in kote-men combination watch the kensen is not pulled skywards with the right hand before the men is made, the footwork needs to be well coordinated and the body balanced. Watch the balance on the tai attari in kirikaeshi.

#### **Kirikaeshi with proper rhythm, cutting and receiving correctly**

Both sides of the kirikaeshi should be adequate for the grade, watch especially for the ability to control the maai so the attacker can cut in correct distance, men cuts that beat the receiver's parry are an embarrassment to the receiver at this level.

#### **Execute an effective nidan waza**

Again, one decent nidan attack, plus of course whatever else is going on, per shiai would be a reasonable level to expect.

#### **Show the appropriate kata level for nidan**



## Kendo Grading Requirements

### Sandan

- as above and in addition

- **Attacks made with intention and never random**
- **Look for attacks that build from toi maai, effective control of the centre should be shown**
- **Ni - sandan waza with correct footwork**
- **Multiple attacks should be attempted**
- **Two successful strikes in each keiko**
- **Show seme in attacks**

Look for the use of the kensen in gaining the centre line as an attack is initiated, also the use of the kensen to unsettle the opponent's composure

#### **Effective zanshin must be shown and acted upon**

Look for hikiwaza from tai attari rather than a desire to go back to issoku itto maai each time. Attacks should be attempted from different maai. Keep within cutting distance after striking.

#### **Show the appropriate kata level for sandan**