

Kendo Guide For Beginners



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EDITORIAL NOTES

Japanese words are written in italic. In the book, you see symbols such as ō and ū. They are called macrons and it means that you make the sound longer. For example, kendo is what people write. But here it is written as *kendō*. It is because the Japanese make the “o” part longer when they pronounce. So it is not kendo but “kend-oh” when pronounced. However, when those macrons are not used in particular names such as organizations names, they are not italicised.

1. KENDŌ GUIDE FOR BEGINNERS

This book is for those who

- want to learn *kendō* but have no access to a *dōjō* (*kendō* learning place) and
- are keen to go over what they learned at their *dōjō*.

This book covers the basic *kendō* movements, *kendō* terms and etiquette and manners.

Many people have asked this question:

Can one learn *kendō* alone?

This is one of the frequently asked questions at the Kendo-Guide.Com website and my answer is NO. No one can learn *kendō* alone. We need to have at least one training partner. We need to have a good teacher to guide us and to put us back on the right track when we take the wrong way.

However, there are not many lucky people out there. There are many cities in the world with no *kendō dōjō*. There are many people who are not lucky enough to have a *kendō* instructor and regular trainings.

It is also true that we have a lot of people out there who purely want to learn *kendō*, but there are not many **GOOD *kendō* resources** out there to aid them.

So what are we going to do about those who do not have any access to a *kendō dōjō*?

- Do we ignore them?
- Do we just tell them to wait until they have a *dōjō* in their city?
- Do we tell them to earn a lot of money so they can travel frequently to a *dōjō* 300km (187.5 miles) away from their city?
- Do we just let them learn *kendō* from bad *kendō* recourses?

I cannot stand seeing those pre-kendoists with enthusiasm and passion taking the wrong path to learning *kendō* (at least they think they are learning *kendō*).

Kendō is not something anyone can teach after a few years of practice. It has to be learned for more than 20 years and only then people may be capable of instructing. So if you are looking for an instructor, you have to be very careful with what he/she teaches.

This book contains traditional *kendō* learning methods for beginners. If you learn the movements and theories thoroughly here, you will be able to maintain good solid, *kendō* basics and knowledge.

As we all know, when we learn something, we need constant corrections from instructors. If you do not have a *dōjō* to go, you do not have that. That is why it is very important to follow the instructions here without skipping any of them. Besides, it is very important to know what authentic *kendō* is. It helps you to recognize **fake teachers**.

Again this book is to help you to learn *kendō* basics and etiquette. If you find a *dōjō* around you but it is really far away, you should still make an effort to go to that *dōjō* as many times as possible.

I really hope that you learn good *kendō* basics and prepare yourself for an opportunity to join a *dōjō* in the future.

The importance of the basics

The basics or *kibon* is the most important thing in *kendō* and we always come back to the basics no matter what grade we hold. Even the **9-dan** teachers always emphasise the importance of the basics, thereby proving the importance of maintaining good basics in *kendō*.

Many want to learn *kendō* because they want to learn cool stuff with a sword. But you cannot just do cool stuff without learning the *kibon*. Many want to skip the *kibon* and start to learn “cool” techniques. I have seen many of these people and most of them quit. Why? It is because they skipped the *kibon*.

If you skip learning solid *kibon*, you will find it more difficult to learn the more advanced techniques. You may be able to learn the easy techniques quickly and start beating your *kendō* mates in matches. However, you will stop improving eventually without having learned good *kibon*. Those who did study the *kibon* thoroughly will start beating you in *kendō*. Not focusing on the *kibon* is a very bad way of learning *kendō*.

Kendō becomes more fun if you learn many techniques, so I want you to learn a lot of them. I also want you to remember that these techniques are built on the *kibon*. Without the *kibon*, you will not learn real *kendō*.

So please take the *kibon* seriously and learn it well. If you learn the *kibon* well, your *kendō* life will be fun and will last a long time.

2. LEARNING KENDŌ, THE BIG PICTURE

Kendō is very hard to learn. If you have learned a bit of *kendō*, you may have already noticed how difficult it is to learn perfectly.

Before we get into how we should learn *kendō*, I would like to tell you how *kendō* is learned in Japan. We should go through some differences so that we know how we should learn *kendō* outside Japan.

Age: Most of the people outside of Japan start *kendō* in their adulthood, while the Japanese start *kendō* at an early age. I started *kendō* at the age of 7. Some start at an even younger age, while some start at an older age. In any cases, we start *kendō* as a kid.

What does it mean? I do not mean that you cannot learn *kendō* if you don't start *kendō* as a kid. What I am saying here is that you should not get frustrated because you cannot learn as quickly as you think you should.

Kids can learn anything very quickly and they are not afraid of making mistakes. Kids will learn by trial and error and don't really get frustrated. They rather enjoy the process of making mistakes and improving their skills.

Through my experiences in instructing *kendō*, adults tend to get frustrated really quickly when they cannot see the progress right away. Frustration leads you to making more mistakes. In turn that makes you more frustrated and then you think that *kendō* is maybe not for you.

That is a **wrong conclusion**. *Kendō* involves many brand new movements for you. There are many movements that you have never done or seen before. It is normal not to be able to do these new movements after a few trials.

If you have a Japanese instructor, he or she must have done *kendō* for more than 15 or 20 years. Although these movements that your instructor shows you look so easy to repeat, you are seeing what your instructor has practised for years. No wonder these movements look so easy, right?

So please don't feel that *kendō* is not for you or you're a slow learner. If you don't want to get frustrated, you may find this video helpful: *How To Learn The Kendō Movements More Easily And Quickly*¹.

Environment: Learning by watching is a very important learning process in *kendō*. How does this affect those who live outside Japan?

These *kendō* kids in Japan go to a *dojo* and there are several very experienced instructors. These instructors are usually 6th dan or above. Besides, these little kids have older kids as their seniors or sempai².

So from the very beginning, kids are surrounded by fairly high ranked kendoists. This means they have many *kendō* role models. They learn not only from the teachers' instructions, but also by watching other *kendō* people.

Japanese *kendō* kids also have problems with learning many *kendō* movements, but as they grow up they learn the movements properly.

However, people outside Japan do not have such an environment. For example, many *dojos* outside Japan do not have instructors. Under such circumstances, it is very hard to learn *kendō* by watching others.

¹ <http://www.kendo-guide.com/How-to-Learn-Kendo-Movements-More-Easily-and-Quickly.html>

² Sempai means those who have done *kendō* longer.

Having no experienced instructors also means you have no examples around to observe. Some possible problems caused by a lack of instructors are; developing bad habits, using inappropriate equipment and so on. This is a bigger problem than you may think.

Without good images of *kendō* movements, our learning process becomes very slow. This makes *kendō* practitioners think that they are not good. So they tend to quit before they actually experience the fun part of *kendō*.

Information: If you go to one of those *dojōs* in Japan, I think it is safe to say that you can learn “*kendō*”. However, outside Japan, I don't know if you can really learn *kendō* in that kind of *dojō*. And it is a big problem for us who live outside Japan.

Those who want to learn *kendō* with passion and end up going to one of those *dojōs* that don't teach *kendō* will end up learning something other than *kendō*. Sadly, these people don't know they are not learning *kendō*. This is very sad and is something we have to prevent from happening.

I am not trying to discourage you from learning *kendō*. I am trying to tell you how important you are to the *kendō* world, and thus how important it is for you to learn *kendō* properly from the beginning.

Let's face it. If you do not have good resources such as *dojōs* and *senseis* available, I don't want you to waste your time by searching on the Internet and learning wrong *kendō*. I want you to learn the proper *kendō* without being confused by wrong information. I also want to help you with good basics so that when you can learn *kendō* at a *dojō*, it will help you.

With the solid basics, you can learn techniques easily and you will suffer less from correcting bad habits. It is easy to imagine, right? Without learning the good basics, it does not matter if you go to a *dojō* or not, it makes it harder to learn *kendō*.

So information you get is very important and this book can help you to maintain the basics that is considered to be good. Do not get wrong information off the Internet.

It takes a long time to actually understand what is going on in *kendō*. People outside Japan have to face a lot more obstacles to face as I mentioned above, including age, environment and information.

I do not know your age, what environment you are in, or what kind of information you have. But I know this.

The Longer You Do *Kendō*, The More Fun You Can Have And The More Deeply You Understand What *Kendō* Is.

You will be amazed, impressed and wonder why these old people can beat the crap out of the young people. I want you to experience that too.

If you have not tried to search *dojō* in your area, you can try the Kendo-Guide.Com *dojō* search³.

Can you tell if an instructor is a good instructor or not? Read some tips⁴.

³ http://www.kendo-guide.com/kendo_dojo_search.html

⁴ Column: How Can You Tell About Good Instructor or Not?, p.46

3. KENDŌ EQUIPMENT: GENERAL INFORMATION

If you decide to do *kendō*, you need *kendō* equipment. But what should you buy? If you have never seen *kendō*, you will probably have some trouble with where to start. Here is what you need.

- Wooden sword or *bokutō* (*bokken*),
- bamboo sword or *shinai*,
- training suits (top and bottom), and
- a set of armour or *bōgu*.

The top part of the training suit is called *keikogi* and the bottom part is called the *hakama*. However, at the very beginning, we don't really need all the *kendō* equipment. At the very beginning, you probably only need a ***shinai*** or ***bokutō***.



Bokutō* or *Bokken
Kodachi (Shorter Sword)
Tachi (Longer Sword)



Shinai

Ideally, we should have a *shinai*, *bokutō*, *keikogi* and *hakama* at the very beginning. They are the **starter kit** of *kendō*. So some *senseis* want us to buy the starter kit at the very beginning. If you go to a *dōjō*, you should follow what your sensei says.

Traditionally we should have the *keikogi* and the *hakama* on when we are at the *dōjō* so that we can have a different mind-set. I personally think that we only need ***bokutō*** to start with. Then gradually add the *keikogi* and the *hakama* and

the *shinai*. The reason that I personally think that beginners don't need everything in the beginning is that it can be overwhelming to the beginners.

If beginners are happy to buy everything at the very beginning, then, I have no problem with that. It shows that they are committed.

Kendō equipment is pricey anyway and I don't want to scare new comers away because of the price they have to pay at the beginning for everything. We will definitely need a *shinai* when we start working with a partner since we have to actually hit. We do not want to hit anything with *bokutō*.

Why? We will destroy either the *bokutō* or an object/person you hit with the *bokutō*, or both.

You Must Know how to Choose a *Shinai*

Not at the beginning. But don't you want to have a *shinai* that does not break easily? Besides when you become more and more advanced, you know your striking habits. So you want to buy a *shinai* that fits your habits.

You may start preferring one kind of *shinai* to another such as the position of the balance.

** You Must Learn How to Maintain the *Shinai* **

Kendō is the safest martial art if we take good care of our *shinai*. If your *shinai* is in bad shape, i.e. broken, there is a possibility that you will **hurt** your training partner.

- ✂ Knowing how to maintain your *shinai*⁵ is vital for you and your partner.
- ✂ Knowing *shinai* adjustments⁶ is very useful when you need to make a *shinai* shorter.

Keikogi & Hakama (top and bottom)

We do not have to get nervous about these at the beginning of our *kendō* history. We just have to be careful with those martial arts shops that sell some weird *keikogi* and *hakama*.

Since *kendō* is not very well-known, people don't know what *keikogi* and *hakama* should look like. That is why we should be very careful when buying *kendō* equipment off the Internet.

Don't go for the cheapest but rather the "**REASONABLE**" price. If you don't know where to buy, this page, "*Kendō* Equipment Shop: Buying *Kendō* Stuff Online"⁷, will help you to choose.

Navy Blue or White Keikogi and Hakama?



⁵ http://www.kendo-guide.com/shinai_maintenance.html

⁶ http://www.kendo-guide.com/shinai_adjustment.html

⁷ <http://www.kendo-guide.com/kendo-equipment-shop.html>

Kendō uniform seems less important than *bōgu*, but they can cause some troubles.

Stick to the **tradition** and the **majority**. That is the safest way when you start anything new. Go for navy blue *keikogi* and *bakama*. Not White.

If you wear navy blue *keikogi* and *bakama* you will cause no troubles. But if you wear white then **some** people will not like the way you look. It is because some people think that the white *keikogi* and *bakama* are for "special" use while others promote them since we can see right away when they get dirty.

Some think white *keikogi* and *bakama* are for females even though it is not true. Women tend to wear white ones and cause less trouble by wearing the white ones than men do. That is all.

When I was a kid, I started training with *keikogi* with a pattern called the **musashi pattern**. I think this is for kids. I am saying it through my experience, but I have never seen Japanese adults wearing a *keikogi* with the *musashi* pattern. If you are an adult beginner, buy the navy blue *keikogi* and *bakama*. You cannot go wrong with them.

Kids up to 10 years old can still wear a *keikogi* with the *musashi* pattern. Again I am talking through my experience here. Why up to 10 years old? It is because that is the age I said good bye to the *musashi* pattern and started wearing a navy blue *keikogi* and *bakama*.

Cotton VS Polyester

Nowadays, we have a *keikogi* called a jersey *keikogi*. The material used is the same or similar to the polyester of normal athletic training wear. This *keikogi* has been popular in Japan especially for summer.

We should have cotton *keikogi* and *bakama*. However, the colour will come off as you wash.

It is OK to wear colour-faded *keikogi* and *bakama* at training but not at tournaments or grading because *kendō* sees **elegance** as an important part of human development.

Thus, even though it is OK to wear colour-faded *keikogi* and *bakama* at training, they should not be too washed off or worn out.

We have to look **clean** and **neat**.

Cotton ones are pricey. So I suggest buying polyester ones especially at the beginning. In *kendō* we usually call this type of *bakama* TETRON. Most *kendō* shops usually have a set of uniforms (the top and bottoms) for beginners; *Kendō* Equipment Shop: Buying *Kendō* Stuff Online⁷.

When We do Not Wear the Polyester Ones

3rd *dan* and above can also wear polyester ones but we have to know when NOT to wear them. It is like daily life. When you go to a formal party, you know you should be formal. You would not wear a T-shirt and jeans.

If you hold a *dan*, you do not want to wear polyester ones at:

- tournaments,
- grading,



Men



Kote



Dō



Tare

A Set of Bōgu

- when you go and train at different *dōjō*, and
- when you host a training session with other *dōjō*.

At special occasions, we had better avoid wearing polyester ones. When you become the 1-*dan* or *shodan*, you probably want to add cotton *keikogi* and *hakama* to your clothing selection. There is a video on how to put *keikogi* and *hakama* on. Hope the video helps you learn how to put them on. Video: How To Put Keikogi And Hakama On In Kendo⁸

A Set of *Kendō* Armour or *Bōgu*

We call a set of armour *bōgu* in Japanese. *Bōgu* means protectors.

Kendō equipment includes a mask or *men*, hand guards or *kote*, body protector or *dō* and thigh protectors or *tare*.

Needless to say, they are all important since we have to protect our body well. Therefore, we want to choose **good** *bōgu*.

However, at the beginning of your *kendō* life, it is not necessary to buy US\$5,000 *bōgu* at all. Once we get better, we move on to better sets of *bōgu* gradually. I know many people want to buy fancy *kendō* equipment. Again I say, Stick to the **tradition**.

For example, you should not buy a shiny *dō* with a cool drawing on it. Sure, *kendō* equipment looks cool but they are not for beginners.

What is important when we buy a *bōgu* at the beginning is the size. We do not want to have a *bōgu* too big or too small.

If it is too big, it does not protect you well.

If it is too small, it does not protect you well.

The size has to be right for you. Every *bōgu* shop tells you how to measure. When you order your *kendō* equipment such as *bōgu*, *keikogi* and *hakama*, you should follow their instructions on how to measure your size.

If you don't know how, you should always ask a *kendō* shop that you are thinking to buy it from. If you don't know which *kendō* shop is good, you can see **reviews of *kendō* shops**⁹.

⁸ <http://youtu.be/EsnHqymFK9M>

⁹ <http://www.kendo-guide.com/kendo-shop-review.html>

4. NORMAL TRAINING PROCEDURE

This is an outline of *kendō* training procedure. There are articles on etiquette/manners at a *dojo* below, so please refer to them.

Begin with a Bow and End with a Bow

As it is said in *budō* (the martial way) that we start with a bow and finish with a bow, when we enter and leave a *dojo*, training place, we bow. This is originally to show our respect and appreciation to the *dojo* we train at. Why originally?

Traditionally, *dojōs* used to have a little shrine or a divine figure such as a martial god to protect the *dojōs* and practitioners. The bow was to show respect and appreciation to the divine figure. *Some *dojōs* still keep a shrine or a divine figure at the front.

There is another important function in this bow though. The bow when entering the *dojo* is a sign to change our mind-set. *Kendō* has become international. Some people have a conflict with bowing to a *dojo* or a divine figure. So this "changing our mind-set" should be more emphasised, I think.

Once we step in a *dojo*, we are no longer in our normal world. We are in a place where we train to become a better person. The bow is a sign of the determination. Please refer to "Meaning of *Dojō*" below.

When we leave the *dojo*, we bow again. It is to show our respect to the *dojo* we have just used. More importantly, we should have a feeling of appreciation to the *dojo* where we train. Without the place, we cannot even learn *kendō*. Thus, we make sure to bow when we leave. Again this bow plays a role of a **switch**. This bow tells us that our training session is over. We can now go back to our normal life, but with what we've learned from the training.

This bowing has to be performed when we leave and re-enter the *dojo* if we have to leave the *dojo* during the training. So basically, when we enter and leave the *dojo*, we bow.

OK. Now I am going to talk about the how normal training proceeds so you will have an idea of how a *kendō* training session goes.

I am going to talk about the following:

Line-Up

Mokusō

Bow To The *Shōmen*, *Sensei* And Each Other

Training Begins

During The Training

Finishing Up

Mokusō

Bow To *Sensei*, *Shōmen* And Each Other

A Little Talk From A *Sensei* (Or Instructor)

Line-up

We have to line up neatly and straight. There should be a leader who tells us to line up. Even when there is no leader to tell you to line up, you still have to line up and make sure to place your equipment neatly on the floor.

Mokusō

When it is time to begin, usually we are in a *seiza* position. In some *dōjōs*, students step forward from where they sit in *seiza* and line up. Whichever the case is for you, the leader will give you a command.

When you hear the command, *mokusō*, quietly close your eyes. Place your left hand on top of your right hand with the palms facing up and make a circle with the thumbs. Breathe in through your nose, hold in the air for a few seconds, and breathe out through your mouth. A more detailed explanation will be introduced later.

When you hear "*Yame*" that means "stop", open your eyes and quietly place your hands back on your thighs.

Bow To The *Shōmen*, *Sensei* And Each Other

Shōmen is the front of the *dōjō*. Traditionally, there is a little shrine or a divine figure at the front wall of the *dōjō*. The Japanese bow to it to show appreciation and respect for protecting the *dōjō* and the practitioners.

However, as I said earlier, *kendō* has become international. This does not work anymore outside Japan, unless people do not mind.

It is a **determination**. It is a switch to change our mind-set again, and we bow to our teachers and training partners to show our respect and appreciation.

Training Begins

If you train in armour or *bogu* on, your leader gives a command to put your *men* (mask) on. If you do not have a *men* to put on, wait in your *seiza* position until the other have put their *men* on, unless otherwise instructed.

During The Training

Follow the instructions given by a leader or an instructor. Make sure to bow to your training partners before and after you train with them.

Finishing Up

After the training, we line up again. Make sure the line is straight. On the command of *seiza*, everyone sits in *seiza*. And if you have a *men* on, on a command of "*Men wo Tore* (or *Men Tore*)", take your *men* off. "*Men wo Tore* (or *Men Tore*)" means "Take your *men* off".

Again depending on the *dōjōs*, you will step forward from where your equipment is and line up, or you just stay where you are.

Mokusō

Meditation after training. Again breathe in through your nose and breathe out through your mouth. Think about how your training went and what you should have done. It is a good time to think about how you will do better in the next training.

Bow To *Sensei*, *Shōmen* And Each Other

Now please pay attention to the order. At the beginning of training, we bow to *shōmen* first. But at the end of training, we bow to *sensei* first.

A Little Talk From A *Sensei* (Or Instructor)

You may have a little talk from your *sensei* or someone about the training. If you have this little talk, do **NOT** start taking off your *bogu*. Stay still in *seiza* and listen to them.

When they are done with their talk, they will dismiss you. Starting to pack your stuff while your *sensei* is talking is considered to be **very rude**.

COLUMN: COMMON INJURIES

Since there is no actual physical contact in *kendō* such as punching and kicking, you don't really see many people get hurt during training or tournaments. However, it is true that we do have some common injuries and those common injuries are mainly caused by repetition of the same movements.

There is a list of common injuries in *kendō* below. Take a look at it and make sure that you do a good warm-up and stretch before training to prevent serious injuries.

- **Snapping (left) Achilles tendon:** Since the left leg is used to kick the floor to jump forwards, snapping the left Achilles tendon is a common kendo injury. I snapped mine.
- **Carpal tunnel syndrome:** Because we must use our hands and wrists to swing a sword repeatedly, we tend to have carpal tunnel syndrome.
- **Back pain:** If you try to straighten your back too much, you will tend to have a back pain.
- **Blisters:** You will have blisters. The common parts of the body that you will have blisters are your left hand and the left foot. If you want to know how to treat blisters, please refer to **Blister Treatment in *Kendō***¹⁰ at Kendo-Guide.Com.

I have done them all. I dislocated my left shoulder too. This is not very common though.

How Can You Avoid These Injuries?

I will tell you the secret. **Don't do *kendō* TOO much.**

If you have a great physical ability, then go ahead and train hard as much as you can. However, if you are like me, no natural athletic abilities, but you choose to do *kendō*, then do not push yourself too hard. You will end up like me and keep hurting yourself.

If you feel a pain, no matter where, REST. Go and see a doctor. Fix it before it's too late. The reason why I kept hurting myself is that I did not take a break. I kept training until it was too late to heal without surgeries.

After I snapped my Achilles tendon, I kept training. Of course, I could not move but I kept going. I don't know how I kept going but I did.

When I dislocated (maybe sprained) my left shoulder, I kept training. It hurt a lot but I kept training. The next day, I could not move my left arm at all. Twenty years later, I could not do *kendō* anymore and had to have a surgery. I do not recommend the way I treated myself. Doing anything **TOO much** is **NOT good!!**

One more thing. If you feel a pain, that is because either you are doing *kendō* **too much** or you are doing something **wrong**. So step back and ask yourself why you are feeling a pain. Ask yourself what you are doing wrong. Ask your teachers or your *kendō* mates what they think why you feel a pain.

Self-awareness is a key to prevent and recover from injuries.

¹⁰ http://www.kendo-guide.com/blister_treatment.html

5. ETIQUETTE/MANNERS

Kendō is not about hitting other people. In other words, hitting is not the main purpose of *kendō*. If you just want to learn how to swing a sword, then we do not call it *kendō*. Since the International Kendo Federation declared the concept of *kendō* and its purposes, I would like to introduce them here.

The Concept of *Kendō*

The concept of *Kendō* is to discipline the human character through the application of the principles of the Katana (sword).

The purpose of practicing *Kendō*

To mold the mind and body,
To cultivate a vigorous spirit,
And through correct and rigid training,
To strive for improvement in the art of *Kendō*,
To hold in esteem human courtesy and honor,
To associate with others with sincerity,
And to forever pursue the cultivation of oneself.
This will make one be able:
To love his/her country and society,
To contribute to the development of culture
And to promote peace and prosperity among all peoples.

(The Concept of *Kendō* was established by All Japan Kendo Federation in 1975.)

There are no such sentences as “to hurt others” and “to hit others with a bamboo stick”. These should be understood by all the *kendō* practitioners. *Kendō* without etiquette/manners is just a brutal fight.

Meaning of *Dōjō*

Dōjō is a training place for martial arts. The definitions of *dōjō* from a dictionary are shown below.

- A place under a bo tree where it is said that Sakyamuni (Buddha) attained spiritual enlightenment.
- A place Buddhist monks practice Buddhism such as a temple.
- A place where a group of people stay mainly to discipline themselves.

Clearly, *dōjō* means more than a training place. So it is not a gym. Once you come into a *dōjō*, you have to be ready to train. That means you should be ready to discipline yourself.

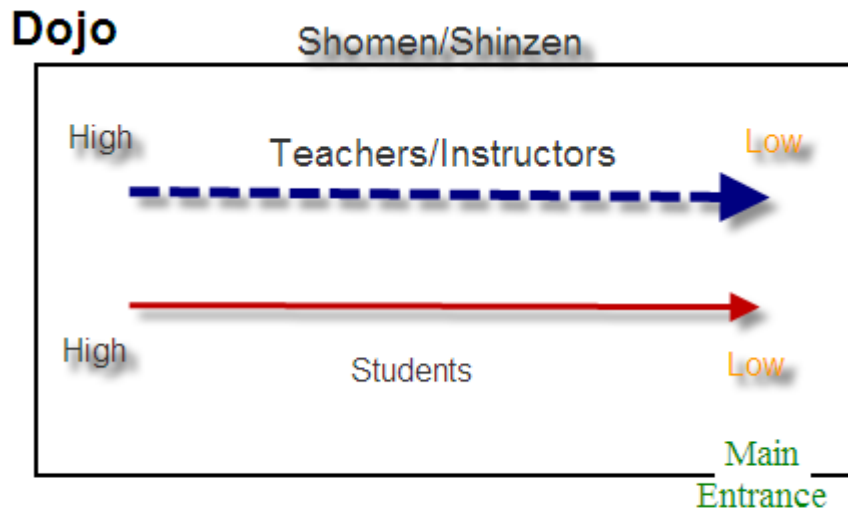
Rules of the *Dōjō*

How do we line up?: Do you know where in your *dōjō* you should be? Believe it or not, most Japanese know where they have to be in a room once they step into a room. If you do *kendō*, you have to know where in a *dōjō* you should be without being told.

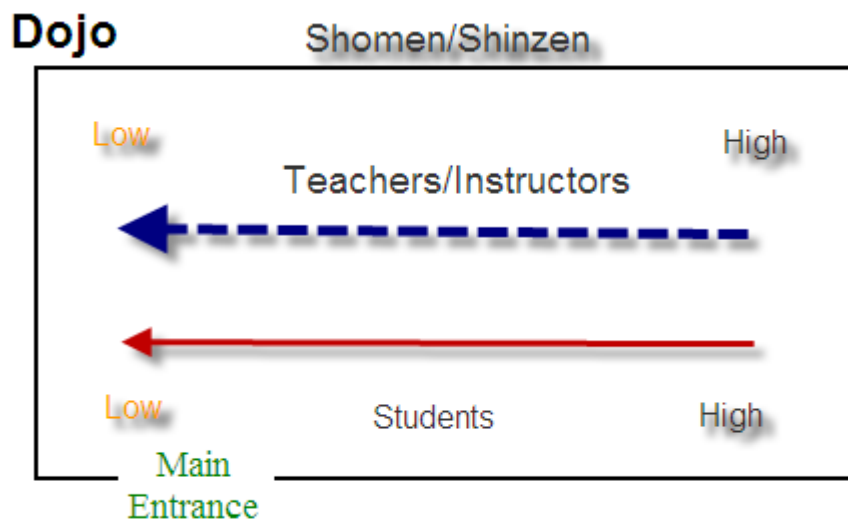
How do we know where in a *dōjō* we and the *sensei* should be? We have names for positions for high ranks and low ranks. *Kamiza* is for high ranks and *shimozu* is for low ranks.

Kanji (Japanese characters) for *kamiza* is “upper seat” and for *shimozu* is “lower seat”. It is easy to figure out, isn’t it? So we have to know where the high ranks sit. Once we figure out where high ranks sit, it is easy to know where we should sit.

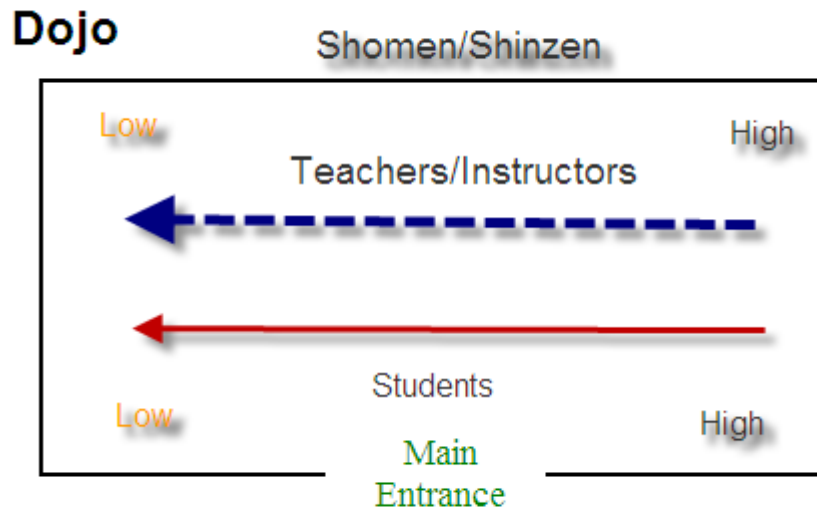
The main entrance plays a great role when we decide where the *kamiza* of a *dōjō* is. *Kamiza* should be furthest from the main entrance of the *dōjō*. Thus, *shōmen* (it is considered to be high) should be across the *dōjō* from the entrance.



If you look at the illustration above, the main entrance of the *dōjō* is on the right bottom. In this case, the higher grade holders should be in the left side of the *dōjō*. Teachers and instructors line up in the same order. The higher is away from the entrance.



If the main entrance is at the left bottom as illustrated above, the higher of the teachers and students should be on the right hand side of the *dōjō*. *Shōmen* should be the other side from the main entrance.



Now if the main entrance is in the middle or somewhere you cannot quite judge, the higher should be on the right.

The Concept Behind the Seating

Have you realised how the seating is decided? It is from ancient *samurai* swordsmanship.

The reason that the higher sit or place themselves at the *kamiza* that is away from the main entrance is to avoid attacks from enemies. The lower class/ranks who sit close to the main entrance fight first to protect their bosses. While the lower class *samurai* are fighting, the bosses can escape or prepare well for the fight.

Remember this. It helps you to decide where you should be outside the *dōjō*, too. The Japanese society still uses this seating. If you have a chance to visit Japan, watch carefully how the Japanese sit in a room. You will find it very interesting.

One more thing. When you visit your friends' house or something, you will be placed at the *kamiza* of a room because you are a guest. So you will be asked to sit at the *kamiza* that is away from the main entrance of the room.

If you visit a *dōjō* in Japan, you are not treated as mentioned above. Do not go and sit at the *kamiza*. You are not a guest in this case. You will offend the people of the *dōjō* you visit and you will be seen as an extremely rude person. That is the last thing you want to do at a *dōjō* in Japan.

Before You Come into the *Dōjō*

- Take off your shoes.
- Bow and come into the *dōjō*.

Inside the *dōjō*, you must **not** do the following:

- Not bowing when walking in and out of a *dōjō*.
- Wearing a coat/jacket in a *dōjō*
- Wearing a cap/hat in a *dōjō*.
- Sitting down with the legs stretched out.
- Sitting with one knee/both knees up.

- Laying down on the floor.
- Eating/Drinking in a *dōjō* (except special occasion)

You may be thinking why you have to follow those rules. The answer is quite simple actually.

Since the *dōjō* is a special place and not an ordinary place, we should separate ourselves from our ordinary life. Therefore, we do not want to do what we normally do. The *dōjō* is not somewhere we relax. It is not our living room. It is to discipline ourselves.

Why We Should Not Do Certain Things at the *Dōjō*?

- **Not bowing when walking in and out of a *dōjō*.**

You have to bow when you walk into and walk out of the *dōjō*. Stop at the entrance and bow. It shows your respect to your *dōjō*, the training place for you to become a better person. And it also makes you ready to train. After all, if there is no *dōjō*, you cannot train. So you are showing appreciation.

You have to bow every single time when you come in and out. Again it is a sacred place, so you want to show your respect every time.

- **Wearing a coat/jacket in a *dōjō***
- **Wearing a cap/hat in a *dōjō***

These are not well-known. I should say TRADITIONALLY we must not keep wearing a jacket, coat, and cap/hat in a *dōjō*. Probably you are thinking why? I also came to that question. Not wearing these in a *dōjō* was normal to me, but recently many Japanese don't follow this tradition anymore because they don't know why.

It was normal for me but to many it is not normal. So I had to come up with an answer for that. In Japan, we take off shoes when we go into a building such as house and *dōjō*.

There are many schools now that let their students keep their shoes on in class. But in my case, from elementary to high school I took off my shoes before entering a school building. This is why I think: shoes are for outside. Jacket, coat, cap and hat are all for outside. We don't need them inside the building. Probably it is the same in some countries.

When I was in Guatemala, I saw many people who took off their hat when entering a church. When I watch movies or documentaries, many people take off their hats when meeting Royalty. So I think taking off hats indicates showing respect. Why? If we take off our hat, we are revealing ourselves. Maybe. Nothing to hide. In that way, they can trust you.

You see, sometimes etiquette in the *dōjō* is *not* very different. If we sit back and look at our own culture, we can **find something common in our cultures**. So all we have to do is to apply it to *kendō* as etiquette in *dōjō*.

You see a lot of people who wear a jacket at tournaments, don't you? This is not a good idea, but what else shall we wear? I think this should be an exception. Some Japanese universities wear a Japanese style jacket (*haori*). We don't have to take off *haori* inside. So this is ok.

- **Sitting down with the legs stretched out.**
- **Sitting with one knee/both knees up.**
- **Laying down on the floor.**

Basically we only have two ways of sitting in a *dōjō*, *seiza* or *agura* (crossing legs). No other ways of sitting should be applied in a *dōjō*. However, some people with knee injuries can do neither of them, *seiza* or *agura*.

If that is the case, they should be allowed to sit in a way that they can sit. I suggest you talk to your *sensei* if you have a problem with sitting in *seiza* or *agura*. Many people sit on their knees and keep the body straight up because they cannot sit in *seiza* or *agura*.

You never lie down in a *dōjō* on purpose.

- **Eating/Drinking in a *dōjō* (except special occasion)**

Drinking water during training is now allowed, I think. When I was a kid, drinking water during training was strictly prohibited. But sports science came in and now drinking water is allowed. If you walk into a *dōjō* **chewing a gum** or **eating**, you are in big trouble. Well, again traditionally speaking.

Now let's go back to the origin of *kendō*. Would you go to a battle or a fight while you were eating? You should be more serious than that. :) Once you get into a *dōjō*, you should be ready to train *KENDŌ*, right?

This thought/concept lies in *kendō*. We must remember the concept all the time; otherwise, *kendō* becomes a hitting sport. In this aspect, etiquette in the *dōjō* is pretty unique.

When Leaving the *Dōjō*

Bow before you step out of the *dōjō*.

Understand the Meaning of “*DŌ*”



Something “*dō*” as in *ken-dō*, *jū-dō*, *kyū-dō* and so on, is “Way” of something. So *kendō* is the way of the sword, *jūdō* is the way of gentleness and *kyūdō* is the way of the bow. We use “*dō*” for non-martial arts, too. *Shodō* is the way of the writing (calligraphy), *sadō* is the way of the tea (tea ceremony) and *kadō* is the way of the flower (flower arrangement).

Japanese see these activities as something that we should pursue through our lives. They are not actives for pleasure or entertainment. They have many teachings and methods to deal with ourselves so we can face ourselves and see ourselves objectively in order to improve ourselves as human beings.

This is what “*dō*” means in Japanese. So strictly speaking, *budō* should be translated as the martial way, not martial arts. The way is “to pursue whatever we are learning through our lives in order to improve ourselves and contribute to the society by becoming a better person.”

Budō, when it is translated as martial arts, is seen as only techniques to defeat others. It is only one aspect of *budō*. It is a self-development method through martial techniques. Some use brushes and pieces of paper for their self-development. Some use tea for the same purpose. We chose **the way of the sword**.

COLUMN: IS KENDŌ A GOOD FORM OF EXERCISE?

There are many people who want to do *kendō* to maintain their fitness. A person asked me through the Kendo-Guide.Com Q&A section¹¹ if *kendō* was a good form of exercise. He wanted to know if *kendō* would build muscle and if it would be a good form of exercise like other martial arts. You may wonder it too.

The answer for the question is yes. *Kendō* is a good exercise to improve your physical strength. However, if you want to make your muscles big like body builders, *kendō* is not for you.

Kendō is both aerobic and anaerobic. It is more like a series of anaerobic movements. The main difference from normal anaerobic exercises is that we shout (breathe out) while we strike whereas the anaerobic exercises stop the air flow while performing.

Many people think that *kendō* is more spiritual aspects or emphasizes on mental/spiritual aspects. It is true but we train physically pretty hard as well.

Here is some interesting fact. Many people cannot handle hard training in *kendō* even though they think they are fit. (See one of the comments made by Blake Bennett for How to increase my stamina for kendo?¹²) It is not because *kendō* is better exercise than other sports but it is different. Simple as that.

Many people try really hard when they start *kendō*. My advice is "take it easy". You will have sore muscles, blisters and so forth. If you try really hard, you will think that *kendō* is too hard for you.

A lot of beginners find it very hard to perform simple footwork exercises at the very beginning. The footwork itself is very simple but you need a lot of practice to get the hang of it. Since it is very simple, beginners overdo footwork training and get tired. So now I force beginners to stop their training even when they say they are OK.

Like I mentioned in the previous column, you have to take it easy. Your body needs to get used to the movements. If you want to train harder, it is not too late to do so after your body get used to the *kendō* movements.

¹¹ http://www.kendo-guide.com/kendo_q_a.html

¹² <http://www.kendo-guide.com/how-to-increase-my-stamina-for-kendo.html>

6. KENDŌ TERMINOLOGY

Kendō terms are Japanese. So if you are familiar with Japanese language, then you will have less trouble. If you do not know anything about Japanese, don't worry. You will. I will try to cover all the terms you may have to know in general *kendō* training session.

Don't feel overwhelmed. As you learn *kendō*, you will become more familiar with the terminology. Hopefully, I can give you some tips to remember or to hear those words.

Counting in Japanese

| | | |
|----|---------------------------|--|
| 1 | <i>ichi</i> | |
| 2 | <i>ni</i> | |
| 3 | <i>san</i> | |
| 4 | <i>Shi / (yon)</i> | |
| 5 | <i>go</i> | |
| 6 | <i>roku</i> | |
| 7 | <i>nana/(shichi)</i> | |
| 8 | <i>Hachi</i> | |
| 9 | <i>Kyū/(ku)</i> | |
| 10 | <i>Jū</i> | |
| 11 | <i>jū ichi</i> | |
| 12 | <i>jū ni</i> | |
| 13 | <i>jū san</i> | |
| 14 | <i>jū shi/(yon)</i> | |
| 15 | <i>jū go</i> | |
| 16 | <i>jū roku</i> | |
| 17 | <i>jū nana / (shichi)</i> | |

| | | |
|-----|---------------------------------|--|
| 18 | <i>jū hachi</i> | |
| 19 | <i>jū kyū</i> | |
| 20 | <i>ni jū</i> | |
| 30 | <i>san jū</i> | |
| 40 | <i>yonjū / (shi jū)</i> | Some might say " <i>shi jū</i> " but normally it is used for age. |
| 50 | <i>go jū</i> | |
| 60 | <i>roku jū</i> | |
| 70 | <i>nana jū/ (shichi jū)</i> | Some might say " <i>shichi jū</i> " but normally it is used for age. |
| 80 | <i>hachi jū</i> | |
| 90 | <i>kyū jū</i> | |
| 100 | <i>hyaku</i> | |

Usually you do not have to remember after 10. However, if you want to learn or get used to it, there is an easy way to remember.

1. Remember 1 to 10 first
2. Remember how to say 20, 30 and so on. It is a combination of single number and “*jū*”. So 20 is *ni-jū*, 30 is *san-jū*, and so on (see the table).
3. Once you remember 20, 30 and so on, all you have to do is to add the numbers from 1 to 9 after 20 and so on. So 22 is “*ni-jū-ni*”.

The words in brackets are alternatives. Some people may say *shichi* instead of *nana* for 7 and so forth.

Greetings Before and After Training

We use these terms all the time, yet many have trouble saying these things. I don't blame them because it is a foreign language for most of them.

Before Training

Onegai shimasu

This is used in Japan frequently because it is used to ask someone to do something. When you ask people to do something, we use this word almost definitely. So what does this mean in *kendō*?

It means, please train with me. We are asking our training partners to train with us. So we say this while bowing to our training partners. Also, we say this before our matches. We ask our opponent to fight with us. Thus, we say “*onegai shimasu*” with a bow before matches.

After Training

Arigatō gozaimashita

You have to say, “Thank you” after asking your partners or opponents to train or do a match with you. So after training we say,

“*Arigatō gozaimashita*”

This is “Thank you very much”. It is politer than just saying “*arigatō*”, which probably equivalent of “Thanks”. Hear the pronunciation¹³.

General terms in *kendō*

Some terms are used by all the Japanese people. Some are used by only *budō* practitioners and some are used by only kendoists. So some words are foreign even to the ordinary Japanese.

Rei : Bow. So when someone says “*REP*”, that means you bow.

Shōmen/Shinzen : *Shōmen* is the front. *Shinzen* is the altar that traditional *dōjōs* have in the centre of their *dōjōs*. *Shōmen* is used more commonly now.

Sensei : It means “teacher”. It is a general term for “teacher”. School teachers are *sensei* as well. Dance teachers are *sensei* as well.

Hai : This means “yes” in Japanese. After *sensei* or someone tells you what to do or teaches something, we have to respond to them. So we say, “*Hai!*”.

Shinai : a bamboo sword

Bokutō / Bokken : a wooden sword

Keiko-gi : Many call the top “*gi*”, but I had never heard Japanese *kendō* people call the top *gi*. We usually call the top, *keikogi*, which means “training top”.

Hakama : It is the bottoms. It looks like a skirt but it is actually a pair of trousers.

Kiai : It often refers to “shout” or “scream”. However, it also refers to the internal energy. The scream is considered as a gauge of the energy level at the early stage. Thus, the louder your *kiai* is, the more energetic you are.

Hajime : This means “to start” or “to begin”.

Yame : This means “Stop”.

Seiza : This is how we sit in *kendō*.

Mokusō : This is usually translated as “meditation”. However, if you are a beginner, do not try to “meditate”. Simply breathe in and out quietly and feel and enjoy the silence. If you can, feel how calm you are getting by *mokusō*.

Sage-tō : When you hear this, you just relax your arms. You are just carrying your sword. So when you walk around with your sword, you are always in *sage-tō* position. Simply you are carrying your sword in your left hand.

Tai-tō : *Tai* means “to wear” and “*tō*” means “sword” so this means “Wear your sword”.

Nuke-tō : *Nuke* means “to draw” and “*tō*” means “sword” so this means “Draw your sword”.

Sonkyo : When you hear this, you squat as if you are sitting on your heels (refer to the picture in p.39). This is another way of greeting.

Kamaete : This means “to take a stance”. When you hear this command, you usually take *chūdan* (the basic stance with the sword in the middle level).

¹³ http://www.kendo-guide.com/terminology_onegai_shimasu.html

Osame-tō : “*Osame*” is a command, “put back”, and “*tō*” means “sword”, so this means put your sword back into your scabbard or *saya*.

Usually when we hear “*Osame*”, we sit in *sonkyo*. And on “*tō*”, we put our swords back into our *saya* so we are in the *tai-tō* position.

Kamae-tō ; It sounds similar to “*kamaete*” and also makes people confused with *osame-tō*. But when you hear this command, you usually take *chudan* straight from the *sage-tō* position. However, do not forget to take *tai-tō* first from the *sage-tō* position. You just do not sit in *sonkyo*.

Men : It is a name of a target on the forehead area. Also it is the name of the mask.

Kote : It is a name of a target from the wrist to the middle part of the forearm. It is also the name of the gloves.

Dō : It is a name of a target on the right and left body trunk. It is also the name of the waist protection.

Tsuki : It is a name of a target on the throat.

Tare : It is a protection we wear around waists.

Himo : String, strap, lace. To Japanese they are all “*himo*”.

These terms are probably enough at the early stage. And these terms will be heard all the time, especially if your instructors are Japanese.

You do not have to be able to say these terms at the beginning, but you have to know what you have to do, when you hear these terms.

Thank you for reading the sample of Kendo Guide for Beginners. As you might have noticed by looking at "Table of Contents", this is designed for beginners and also for those instructors who need extra help. I try to cover the concepts and principles, especially behind manners/etiquette.

Let's stay in touch so we can together promote kihon based kendo in the world!!

Sincerely yours,

Hiro Imafuji
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Masahiro “Hiro” Imafuji was born in 1973. He is the founder and representative of Kendo For Life, LLC and runs the website, Kendo-Guide.Com.

Hiro started *kendō* at the age of 7 at *Shūbukan* in *Itami City, Hyōgo*, Japan. *Shūbukan* has more than 200 years of history and counted as one of the three greatest dojos in Japan.

Shihan (the head master of the dojo) at that time was the late *Juichi Tsurumaru sensei* who graduated from *Budo Senmon Gakko* (a national school for training young men to teach *kendō* and other martial arts). Hiro learned *kendō* from the late Tsurumaru *sensei*, the late Murayama *sensei* and Miyazaki *sensei*.

After spending 6 years in New Zealand, where he instructed local kendoists, Hiro relocated to Guatemala, where he instructed Guatemalan kendoists between 2000 and 2002 as a full-time volunteer of Japan International Cooperation Agency and helped them to form an official *kendō* association.

Upon moving to the United States, he started instructing *kendō* at West Virginia University and assisted in the formation of a *kendō* club in 2005. Currently, he instructs at Mudokwan and Gotokukan Imafuji Dojo in Indianapolis, Indiana. He holds 6-dan in *kendō*.