

TESTING PROCEDURES

In Japan, our sense of what these documents [rank certificates] mean may best be expressed by the English word “commencement”. To commence is to start out, not to finish. So, these documents are not goals in themselves, but indications of a new beginning, a new start. If the certificates were goals in themselves, you could quit practicing once you got one. But, if we view them as symbols of commencement, they just indicate that you must move on toward a new level. When you reach the next level, you’ll have another commencement, which should signify a new start toward even higher goals. I think that the importance of awarding certificates is ceremonial – a rite of passage signifying a new beginning. This is very important. We always talk about the “beginner’s mind” – the fresh and enthusiastic spirit of a person starting something new. You need to have beginner’s mind over and over again to continue with any long-term project.

Shigenobu Okumura, interview in Aikido Today Magazine, vol. 9, number 5.

Testing should not be regarded as a trial, but more as an opportunity for you to show the other members of the *dojo* how you are progressing in your study of *Aikido*. This is a time when you can bring together the hours and effort that you have put into your training. It is also a time for the rest of the *dojo* to evaluate how well we have done in preparing you for the test. We will observe not only your physical skills, but also your attitude and your commitment. Your concentration should not be on passing or failing; the measure of your success is more in how you handle the test and its result than in whether or not you pass.

When *sensei* feels that you are ready to test, you will be informed of the testing date. It is considered impolite to ask to test. Prior to the test, complete an exam application and written test, and give them to *sensei* along with the test fee. It is your responsibility to take care of this; you should not have to be prompted to complete the paperwork.

When the examination begins, the *yudansha* will sit along the *joseki*, and the names of the students testing will be called out. They will sit *seiza* along the *shimoseki*, facing the *joseki*. Next the names of the students testing for a particular rank will be called; they will form a single line in the center of the mat, facing the *shomen* and sitting *seiza*. When all of the candidates are in place, they will bow towards the *shomen*, and then turn to face the *yudansha*, bowing to them. Note that the candidates should initiate this bow.

The test will usually begin with the required *Ki* exercises (*aikitaïso*); you will be tested by either one of the *yudansha* or one of the ranking belts. After that, *sensei* will choose an *uke* for you; the *uke* will take her or his place behind you, and you will turn and bow (*ritsurei*). *Sensei* will call the technique, and you will demonstrate it until asked to stop. If the technique involves a pin, do it once on each side, and then project the *uke*.

If your test includes *jïyu waza*, *sensei* will specify the attack that *uke* is to use; you will be expected to demonstrate a variety of throws, using multiple arts if possible. During this part of the test, maintain proper *maai* and good *kime*.

If your test includes *randori*, you should sit *seiza* to the right of the center of the mat, with your back towards the *joseki*. *Sensei* will select the appropriate number of *uke*, and they will form a single line, facing you, in *seiza*. When you are ready, bow and the *uke* will attack. Defend yourself against the attacks until told to stop. It will be important to demonstrate a variety of techniques, along with good strategy in using the available space. It will also be very important to follow the four basic principles of *Aikido*. When told to stop, return to your original position, and bow to your *uke*. The *uke* will then return to their seats; you should return to the center of the mat (straightening your *gi* if necessary), face the *shomen* and wait for further instruction.

When you are told that the test is over, bow to the *shomen*, then to the *yudansha*, and then to the students seated along the *shimoza*. Then you may return to the *shimoseki* and sit with the rest of the candidates. The results of the exam will be announced at a later date; it is considered impolite to ask if you passed or failed.

Those students who aren't testing should be attentive and alert. You should sit *seiza* or cross-legged without leaning against the wall, and be prepared to assist in the test. Testing is an important event in the *dojo*, and it deserves your respect and attention.