

New Student Guide



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## Letter from Yamada Shihan



Dear USAF Members:

I would like to thank the committee of Board Members who worked hard in creating this New Student Guide. I am pleased that it is such a good resource to help you and the members of your dojo. There are many things that are explained in it which often feel confusing when first beginning to practice Aikido. I think having this available to our members is a good way of making sure that proper behavior and etiquette is understood and observed in all our dojo. This is important to not only me, but when everyone in a dojo participates in the upkeep and shows their respect through their behavior, it creates a pure environment where it is easier to practice with good intentions. This Guide gives clear information on how to follow these ideas. It also provides information on the USAF—this is helpful to show members a little about who we are as an organization and what we do to support our dojo and the continuation of traditional Aikido.

I hope you find this useful and that it helps answer some of the questions you might have.

Sincerely,  
Y. Yamada

President, United States Aikido Federation  
Chief Instructor, New York Aikikai

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## 2.0 Introduction



As a new student, you have made a commitment to study Aikido; a commitment we hope you will pursue with sincerity. The process of learning this art is a journey and on it you will experience new ideas, physical challenges and no small degree of frustration. Just remember, all of us have stood where you are now standing—at the beginning. We understand how it feels to immerse yourself in a new environment that is exciting, confusing and even somewhat intimidating.

People study Aikido for many different reasons. You may be drawn to the art for exercise, self defense, spiritual development, self realization or any number of reasons. All are valid and all have a place in Aikido. The art is infinitely flexible and adaptive and will meet any/all of those needs for the sincere practitioner. Like any truly worthwhile endeavor, it will not always be easy. However, if you persevere, you will find that your life will be enriched in many ways. Consistent Aikido practice improves one's physical conditioning—strength, balance, flexibility, coordination, cardiovascular health—and one's mental conditioning—self-confidence, concentration, perception, alertness, and concern for others. Aikido teaches one how to focus mind, body, and spirit into a vital, perceptive, and engaging sense of awareness. In short, Aikido is a vehicle for physical, mental and spiritual transformation.

However different our reasons may be for coming to practice, we all share a common medium, Aikido, and through that medium, a common culture. In addition to learning new ways of moving and being in your body, you are also entering into an environment which is steeped in aspects of Japanese culture which may seem somewhat esoteric even to modern Japanese. It is the purpose of this guide to provide you with an understanding of the dojo environment and the cultural framework within which our training takes place. It is our hope that this guide will encourage you as you start on your path and help you to feel welcome in the world of Aikido.

### 3.0 What is Aikido?



The name “Aikido” is composed of three Japanese words:

“ai” (harmony),

“ki” (energy/spirit), and

“do” (way or path).

Fundamentally, Aikido is the “way of the spirit of harmony”. However, the word “Aikido” can be translated as the “way of blending energy”, or the “path of unity with the fundamental force of nature”.

Aikido is a true budo or martial way that evolved in the historic tradition of Japanese warrior arts. Studied in earnest, budo is more than a science of tactics and self defense. It is a discipline for perfecting the spirit of the practitioner.

Aikido is a paradox: it is an extremely effective form of self defense but it is also considered by many to be a path of peace and reconciliation. Some dojo lean more towards one side of this equation than the other. Don’t forget that the Founder, O-Sensei arrived at his deep state of understanding only after many years of rigorous, martial training; it would be extremely presumptuous to think that we can start where he left off! So, is Aikido a path of peace or a martial art? The answer is, if it isn’t both, it is neither.

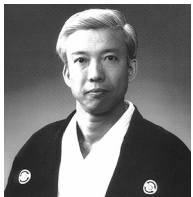
### 3.1 History of Aikido and O-Sensei



**O-Sensei | Morihei Ueshiba** | 1883-1969



**Nidai Doshu | Kisshomaru Ueshiba** | 1921-1999



**Sandai Doshu | Moriteru Ueshiba**

Although Aikido’s techniques are derived from centuries old Samurai battle tactics, the art in its modern form was created during the first half of the twentieth century by an extraordinary martial artist, Morihei Ueshiba (1883-1969). Ueshiba (referred to by his students as O-Sensei, (“Great Teacher”) was a remarkable individual. As a young man, he studied and became expert at several traditional forms of Japanese martial arts including sword and spear arts as well as empty hand combat (Jiu-Jitsu). A deeply spiritual man, O-Sensei brooded over the futility of a path based on violence and domination over others. Leading a life of austerity and rigorous training, he struggled with this dilemma for many years. In a moment of profound awakening, O-Sensei realized that winning at the expense of another was, at best, a temporary victory which ultimately leads to one’s own destruction. The essence of this revelation is contained in his statement, “Masakatsu Agatsu” (true/correct victory is victory over oneself). Transformed by this spiritual insight, O-Sensei’s technical mastery evolved into a martial art of refinement and astonishing power, fundamentally different from those which preceded it.

“The secret of Aikido,” he wrote, “is to harmonize with the movement of the universe and bring ourselves into accord with the universe itself.” In his later years, O-Sensei maintained that the warrior’s path is a path of love (“AI”), a way to overcome the discord within ourselves and bring peace to the world. He said, “Aikido is not an art to fight with or defeat enemies. It is a Way to bring all people together as one family. The essence of Aikido is to put oneself in tune with the guiding principles of the universe. Those who have grasped the inner meaning of Aikido have the universe within themselves”. Aikido offers us the opportunity to put these high ideals into practice and make them manifest in the physical reality of our day-to-day existence.

After O-Sensei passed away on April 26, 1969, the Japanese government posthumously declared Morihei Ueshiba a Sacred National Treasure of Japan.

O-Sensei’s son, Kisshomaru Ueshiba, inherited the title Doshu (Leader of the Way). He continued his father’s work at Aikido World Headquarters (Hombu Dojo) until he passed away in 1999. Today, O-Sensei’s grandson, the third Doshu, Moriteru Ueshiba, continues to enlighten the lives of men, women and children from over seventy countries throughout the world.

You are now a part of a world-wide network of Aikido practitioners. As such, you may soon find yourself meeting, interacting and making friends with Aikido practitioners from around the world.

## 3.2 General principals of Aikido



Aikido is a purely defensive art based on the principle of active non-resistance. Rather than meeting violence with reciprocal violence, the aikidoka (practitioner) learns to evade and redirect the power and energy of the attack resulting in the attacker being unbalanced and subsequently either projected (thrown) or immobilized (pinned). Thus, it is the attacker's own force and momentum which ultimately neutralize the aggression. Since the aikidoka never meets force with force, the techniques can be effectively applied even with a larger, stronger attacker or (at the higher levels of the art) with multiple attackers. While all traditional arts emphasize defense, Aikido stands alone in that its highly developed standard of ethics are manifest in the techniques themselves. Great emphasis is placed on using the minimum amount of force necessary to neutralize an attacker's will and desire to fight, while simultaneously seeking to protect the assailant from the more extreme consequences of his own violence.

**Partner practice:** Do not be mistaken; Aikido is budo. Aikido techniques are extremely powerful and some have the potential to cause pain, injury, or even death. For this reason, Aikido practice must always be conducted in a spirit of mutual respect and cooperation. Unlike most other martial arts, there is very little solo or “kata” practice in Aikido. (The exception being some weapons training.) Since our goal is the blending of our energy with that of another, practice is done with a “partner” not an “opponent”. Many people, when first exposed to the art, note that, “it looks like the attacker is just going along with the technique.” That is because that is exactly what they are doing! While this may be difficult to understand in the “win/lose” context of modern sport, it becomes very clear when one actually experiences the power of Aikido. To resist an accomplished aikidoka's technique is not only foolish, it is downright dangerous. If competition were allowed, we would have to eliminate many of our most powerful techniques because of the risk of serious injury.

Always remember that your partner is, in essence, loaning you their body so that you can perfect your movement. You must always respect each individual's unique situation, taking into account differences in age, size, strength, physical condition etc. Don't forget that for every throw or pin that you execute, your partner will get to “return the favor” so be sure to treat others the same way you wish them to treat you. Everyone on the mat is there to learn and help their partners learn and improve. Practice should be serious yet joyful, energetic yet supportive. Remember, Aikido is not a sport or a game; there are no tournaments or other forms of competition in Aikido. It is each student's responsibility to bring only positive, constructive energy onto the mat.

### 3.3 United States Aikido Federation



Yoshimitsu Yamada | 8th Dan | Shihan

**Beginnings of the USAF:** Yoshimitsu Yamada Shihan began his training as an uchi-deshi (live in student) of the founder in 1957. In those days, Aikido was not known to the general public. One had to have several character references to be allowed to train. As an uchi-deshi, Yamada Sensei lived in the dojo, took four or five classes per day and was also responsible for maintaining the dojo as well as taking care of the personal needs of O-Sensei and his family. In 1964, Yamada Sensei came to New York to participate in the New York World's Fair. Beginning with a small group of students who were already practicing Aikido, he formed the New York Aikikai which he still heads.

In 1966 Mistunari Kanai Shihan, another of the Founder's uchi-deshi, arrived in the U.S. and began teaching at the New England Aikikai in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Aikido had firmly taken root on the east coast.

In 1972, Akira Tohei Shihan left his teaching post at Hombu dojo and moved to Chicago where he established the Midwest Aikido Center in 1975. In 1981, Kazuo Chiba Shihan, who was also an uchi-deshi of the Founder, arrived in California and founded San Diego Aikikai. These four original students of O-Sensei, along with Yoshioka Shihan in Hawaii formed the United States Aikido Federation with Yamada and Kanai Shihan representing the East Coast, Tohei Shihan the Midwest, Chiba Shihan heading the West Coast with Yoshioka Shihan heading the Hawaiian region. In 1988, Seiichi Sugano Shihan, another of the Founder's uchi-deshi arrived in New York. After many years of instructing in Europe and Australia, Sugano Sensei joined Yamada Sensei at the New York Aikikai.

Unfortunately, Tohei Shihan, Kanai Shihan, and Yoshioka Shihan have since passed away.

Thus, while the USAF was originally divided into four regions, this is no longer the case. The geographic regions became less relevant as students from each region became teachers, many of whom moved outside of their original regions. Since a student's primary loyalty is to his/her teacher and the central USAF organization, it no longer made sense to maintain a structure based on geographical boundaries. Hence, in 2005, the USAF was reconfigured as one organization. There are currently over two hundred USAF Aikikai affiliated member dojo.

The USAF currently has 25 Shihan within North America.

### 3.4 USAF mission and structure



The United States Aikido Federation (USAF) is a 501 (c) 3 not-for-profit organization. The direction and management of the USAF is carried out by a Board of Directors and the Technical Committee. The purposes and principle of the USAF as codified in its by-laws are:

- a) to spread and maintain the integrity of the martial art of Aikido, as created, developed and exemplified by O-Sensei, Morihei Ueshiba, and spread by the Aikikai Foundation, Aikido World Headquarters, Tokyo, Japan.
- b) To develop and guide the practice of Aikido and its instruction as it is established at Hombu and disseminated by the USAF, a New York not-for-profit corporation.
- c) To promote and develop good will and friendship, and to improve lines of communication, among members of the USAF and other Hombu recognized organizations.
- d) To register approved Dan grades with Hombu as laid down in the international regulations of Hombu.
- e) To standardize Kyu grading consistent with and as described in the international regulations of Hombu.
- f) To represent, defend and promote the interests of members of the USAF.
- g) To support and promote Aikido as created by the Founder Morihei Ueshiba, and spread under the direction of Hombu.
- h) To carry out such other activities as are permitted by the laws of the State of New York and necessary or incidental to the achievement of the above purposes.

The USAF Technical Committee provides guidance in all matters pertaining to technique, testing requirements and rank promotions. All Yudansha (black belts) are vetted by USAF Shihan (Master Instructors), Instructors (Shidojin), and Assistant Instructors (Fukushidojin). While Shihan are appointed by the Aikikai World Headquarters, certification for Shidojin and Fukushidojin is granted by the USAF Technical Committee to assure that the quality of instruction is consistent throughout the organization.

The USAF also provides a direct connection to Hombu Dojo, the Ueshiba family and the International Aikido Federation, of which, the USAF is the sole United States representative to that international Aikido congress. Members of the USAF are proud that the Aikido being taught in their dojo is a direct transmission of the art, passed down from O-Sensei to his most senior students, to us.

## 4.0 Etiquette and culture of the dojo



### Dojo etiquette

The word “dojo” literally means “place of the Way”. In other words, it is a space specially set aside for the practice of a particular path or Way. It is NOT merely a gym or health club and should not be treated as such. Even if the space in which you practice is located in a recreational center or other facility and the mats are stored in a closet before and after training, it is important that you respect the mat area as a special place for a special activity. The dojo is more than just a space; it is a community of like minded individuals and also the repository of many years of sincere effort on the part of all the aikidoka who came before you.

Sincerely following proper dojo etiquette is an important part of your practice. Your outward demeanor is a reflection of your state of mind and inner being. If your demeanor is sloppy, inattentive or overly casual, you are not in the proper frame of mind to benefit from practice. While the rules governing proper etiquette may vary slightly from one dojo to the next, the underlying principles of sincerity, respect and humility are universal and immutable.

## 4.1 Etiquette and culture of the dojo



### About Bowing

You have probably already noticed that a great deal of ceremonial bowing takes place in the dojo. It is important to understand that this activity has no religious significance in the context of your training. In Japanese culture, it is roughly the equivalent of shaking hands or, in a military context, saluting. It is a way to show respect and gratitude, no more. We demonstrate this attitude of respect and thankfulness toward our dojo, the Founder's memory, our Instructors and our training partners.

Japanese culture has evolved a highly complex system of bowing based on the relative status of the individuals involved. Unless you are Japanese (and even if you are!) this can be hopelessly complicated and you are almost certain to err if you attempt to decipher the complex social code governing this behavior. Don't try. Just perform a simple bow with a sincere heart and you can't go wrong.

**How to bow ("rei"):** Standing, with your heels together, bow from the waist with your back straight and your arms at your sides. (Making fists or other flamboyant hand gestures as well as verbal exclamations are considered overly militaristic in Aikido and should be avoided).

**How to bow while sitting in kneeling position ("seiza"):** Kneel with your knees approximately two fist-widths apart with your big toes either touching or right over left. Your body should be erect with good posture (pelvis forward, back straight) but not rigid. (Note: Seiza is the proper way to sit whenever you are on the mat. Never sit with your feet extended or leaning/slouching on the mat. If you have a medical condition which does not permit sitting in seiza, you may sit with your legs tucked cross-legged or "anza").

Place your left hand down first, then your right creating a triangle with your index fingers and thumbs. Lower your torso with your back and neck straight and bow from the waist. Do not allow your rear end to raise up. Rise back to original seiza position with your right hand returning to your thigh, then your left. When rising from seiza, step forward with your right foot first then rise.

**Entering and leaving the dojo:** Perform a standing bow when entering and leaving the dojo. Remember that without the tireless efforts of many individuals who have dedicated countless hours of rigorous training over many years, we would not have the privilege of practicing this marvelous art. Respect for the dojo reflects our respect for all those whose dedication makes our practice possible.

## 4.2 Etiquette and culture of the dojo



**Stepping upon the mat:** Bow “(sitting seiza)” toward the front (shomen) of the practice area usually containing a picture of O-Sensei at the (kamiza, kamidana) when entering or leaving the mat. Some dojo prefer that you perform this sitting. In others, a standing bow is permitted; follow the tradition of the dojo. You should be on the mat several minutes prior to the start of class. If you are unavoidably late, wait at the edge of the mat in seiza until the Instructor acknowledges you, and then bow toward the kamiza and the Instructor before joining practice. If you need to leave the mat for any reason, ask the Instructor’s permission first: Do not simply walk off the mat. If in immediate distress, your partner should inform the Instructor. This is for safety reasons as well as respect. The Instructor is responsible for his/her students and needs to know if there is some reason you can’t continue to train. If you get dizzy or need to “catch your breath”, it is acceptable to sit quietly on the edge of the mat until you feel ready to go on.

**Beginning and ending class:** A few minutes before class starts, the students will line up in seiza in front of the kamiza. In some dojo, this is done according to rank with senior members to the right. In other dojo this hierarchy is not enforced and students may sit wherever they choose. Sit quietly and attentively. The Instructor will bow onto the mat, sit in front of the class and lead the students in a kneeling bow towards the photo of O-Sensei. (Remember that this is not a religious act so much as an expression of remembrance and gratitude, sort of like bowing your head in memory of a revered grandparent.) The Instructor will turn and face the class, bow and say with the class, “onegai shimasu” (o-nay-guy-she-mass) which means “may I be of service”, or “please grant me this favor”. This phrase is also used when bowing in to a new partner.

At the end of class this process is repeated in reverse, bowing first to O-Sensei, then to the class with the phrase “domo arigato gozaimashita” (doh-moh-ahh-ree-gah-toh goh-zai-mashta) meaning “thank you very much (past-tense, for what you have just received)”.

Bow to each of your partners. Bow to the Instructor when he helps you. Sit in seiza and bow when the Instructor is helping someone near you on the mat. In other words, you can’t get in trouble for bowing too much! (Can one ever be too respectful?) While all of this bowing may seem excessive and somewhat redundant, remember that the very essence of budo is respect. Each bow should be performed with an attitude of sincerity and humility that is physically evident in your demeanor.

## 4.3 Etiquette and culture of the dojo



**Your uniform (do-gi or keiko-gi):** Your uniform (usually referred to simply as a “gi”) is a traditional way to dress for practice. Some say it was derived from the padded clothing worn under the Samurai’s armor. In any case, changing into this uniform serves to further separate your practice from the mundane aspects of daily life. Your gi should be plain white. Some people have their name written on a sleeve or a small, discreet kanji inscription on their gi but large, flashy patches, advertising, flags and other decorations are frowned upon. Most USAF dojo do not award colored belts to adults. (There are exceptions; go along with whatever your dojo requires.) The gi jacket is always worn with the left lapel crossed over the right (unless you are a Shinto priest or the unfortunate subject of a funeral.) Some one will show you the correct way to tie the belt or “obi”. Always make sure that you and your gi are clean and free of odor. (Some folks don’t wash the belt, apparently hoping it will turn black all by itself.) Keep your finger and toe nails clipped and do not wear jewelry on the mat since it might scrape you or your partner. Tape wedding bands or other jewelry which cannot physically be removed.

**The hakama:** The divided skirt-like garment you see is called a “hakama”. It is a traditional Japanese article of clothing. In the past, this was not some esoteric training uniform; for the Samurai, it was everyday attire. For most modern Japanese, it will be worn only a few times during a person’s life, usually at very formal occasions such as traditional weddings. The hakama is worn by practitioners of most of the traditional martial arts of Japan (“koryu”- old schools) as well as more modern derivatives such as Kendo, Kyudo and Aikido.

In most USAF dojo, the hakama is only worn by students who have achieved the rank of shodan. Again, there are exceptions. Female members are sometimes allowed to wear it (presumably for reasons of modesty) whenever they choose but most modern women prefer to be treated equally with their male counterparts and do not avail themselves of this option. In other schools, those about to receive their black belt or those who are called upon to teach are allowed to wear it. As always, follow the tradition established by your particular Instructor. Black or dark (indigo) blue are the only acceptable colors; this is formal attire, not a costume.

You may read or hear elaborate treatises about the symbolism of the number of pleats or the type of knot that is tied or other myths such as that the hakama is worn to hide the footwork of the practitioner. Most of these stories are of somewhat dubious origin and have no basis in the historical record. The elaborate folding that you see black belts engaged in after class is designed to preserve sharp pleats in the hakama and is not some kind of religious ceremony.

## 4.4 Etiquette and culture of the dojo



**Weapons training:** In feudal Japan training encompassed a wide array of skills which included strategy, tactics, fortifications and, especially, weapons. Empty hand training was secondary to weapons training. It was considered a last resort to be employed only if something had gone horribly wrong and the soldier found himself weaponless on the battlefield. In the early twentieth century when the modern arts evolved, this emphasis became reversed. Weapons became separate arts in many cases such as Kendo (sport swordsmanship) and Kyudo (Japanese archery). O-Sensei, having studied ancient sword and spear arts, retained some weapons training within the pedagogy of Aikido. The primary weapons practiced in Aikido are the sword (“bokken or bokuto- wooden sword) and the short staff (jo).

While many dojo provide some practice weapons for use in class, it is advisable to acquire your own so that you can practice outside of class. Weapons kata are about the only way a student can practice without a partner and training with weapons greatly enhances your empty hand technique. Weapons training fosters a better understanding of proper distance and timing and adds an extra level of mental focus and spiritual intensity to your Aikido experience. Weapons training begins with basic kamae (posture/stance), proceeds to suburi (practicing basic cuts, thrusts and strikes) to kumi-tachi and kumi-jo (partner practice with weapons), and often waza (executing techniques while holding the jo and bokken). You will also practice tori techniques for disarming an attacker who is armed with bokken, jo or tanto (wooden knife) while empty handed. Unlike most other martial arts, weapons training is not reserved for senior students. You will be allowed to participate as soon as you begin.

**Weapons etiquette:** Never handle another person’s weapons without permission. Students should “bow in” their weapons, essentially dedicating them to O-Sensei before training.

There are also specific ways of handing a weapon (particularly the sword) to another person. These rituals evolved not just as social formalities, but as ways to make the handling of deadly weapons safer for all concerned. Essentially, the handle should be in your left hand and the edged part of the blade should face you—the person handing off the sword. This is a courtesy in the highest form. It makes it difficult for you to attack them—(if you notice that your partner isn’t handing the weapon back to you in the same fashion, please appreciate that your partner might be very much higher ranked). Some dojo place more emphasis on these formalities than others. Always treat weapons with the respect you would show any other deadly weapon. You should not regard these as mere “imitations” of “real” weapons. With the exception of the tanto, these are quite real; many people throughout history have been killed in duels with bokken and Japanese police and security forces still use jo for riot control and other duties.

## 4.5 Etiquette and culture of the dojo



**Dojo cleaning and other responsibilities:** Most Aikido dojo are operated on a volunteer basis and are also not-for-profit organizations, of which you have an interest as a member. There are many ways you can serve your dojo; it is up to you to volunteer.

Joining a dojo is not like joining a health club. You are not just “buying” some lessons. This means that it is the students’ responsibility to clean and maintain the dojo. After every class, the mat should be swept and the dojo dressing rooms and common areas cleaned. These activities are age-old matters of respecting the dojo space and leaving the dojo as clean, if not cleaner than the moment that you entered. Don’t wait for someone to ask you to help... it is part of your training to contribute to the space that is the dojo. Look around. Are the trash cans full? Does the bathroom need cleaning? Find something that needs to be done and do it!

There will be periodic clean up and maintenance days when the dojo will be more thoroughly cleaned and any repairs made. In some dojo, these are regularly scheduled. In others, this is done as needed. Some dojo manage the space in such a way that you’ll never notice the ongoing preservation of the space. Whatever your dojo experience, all dojo members should gladly take part in everyday cleaning activities, regardless of rank or status. Remember, it is your dojo. Just as with anyone’s outward personal bearing, your dojo, and its appearance, is a manifestation of the spirit of the members of the dojo. A few minutes spent attending to dojo cleanliness will go a long way in your future practice and positively contribute to how others perceive the dojo.

## 5.0 Rank and promotions



Rank in USAF Aikido is not easily or quickly attained. Unlike some more commercial Martial Arts organizations, promotions in the USAF are not looked upon primarily as a source of revenue. There are six Kyu ranks preceding Black Belt. In most USAF dojo, there are no colored belts associated with these ranks; practitioners wear the white belt until achieving Shodan (again, there are notable exceptions). Children who practice must first move up through a separate ranking system before being allowed to train for Kyu rank. The Technical Committee has established 16 as the youngest age a person may be tested for Black Belt.

Each rank requires a specific minimum of training days (counted from the last test) to be eligible for testing. It should be emphasized that this is a minimum and does not automatically confer the right to test. That right is solely at the discretion of the Instructor and it is considered extremely bad form to request a promotion. After moving up through the six Kyu ranks, you may enter into the Dan or Black Belt ranks. Theoretically, there are ten Dan ranks. However, tenth Dan is considered unattainable since to achieve such rank would imply that one has learned all there is to know about Aikido, an impossibility! The path to Shodan (1st degree Black Belt) takes, on average, approximately six or seven years of serious, frequent practice. While this may seem a long time in our fast track, short attention span culture, it represents a commitment to the art which goes beyond mere technical proficiency. Testing for Kyu ranks is left to Shidoin and Fukushidoin at the local level. All Kyu ranks are recorded and administered by the USAF Headquarters. Upon passing your first test you will receive a Yukyusha book. You should maintain good records and remember to present your book when attending Seminars as this record will impact your fulfilling some future Kyu rank testing requirements. Bring your Yukyusha book along with you when visiting other dojo.

Yudansha (Black Belt) testing is conducted most often by Shihan members of the Technical Committee, usually at one of the major annual Camps or Seminars. You are encouraged to attend testing even if you are not eligible so that you can observe the level of training that is expected at each rank. Testing provides an opportunity for students to demonstrate their ability to perform under pressure. As one moves up in rank, the tests become more free-form, meaning you are not told in advance what to expect. The Yudansha tests are physically and emotionally exhausting, often taking place in front of hundreds of spectators and fellow students. Suffice it to say, when you achieve rank in the USAF you know you have earned it. (Sometimes when a person has a physical or age related handicap and they have practiced sincerely to the fullest extent of their ability, the test may be modified or waived based on the

## 5.1 Rank and promotions



person's commitment and positive contribution to the art.) Upper Dan ranks are granted by the Technical Committee based on the individual's long term commitment and continuing progress in Aikido. All Dan ranks are registered and approved by Hombu, Aikido World Headquarters. Upon receiving a Yudansha book, you should continue to maintain good records and remember to present your book when attending Seminars as this record will impact your fulfilling future Dan rank testing requirements. When visiting other dojo, it never hurts to have your book with you.

**Examination Etiquette:** Most dojo conduct Kyu examinations several times per year. Sometimes different dojo will gather together to conduct exams. Sixth Kyu exams are held once per month or when needed. There is no fee for the sixth Kyu exam but members are expected to join the USAF at this time. The protocol of the test are as follows: Those eligible will be called individually to the front of the Dojo by the examining committee. You and your partner will sit in seiza in front of the Kamiza and, when told to begin, will bow first to O-Sensei, next to the examiners and finally to your partner. After the test is concluded, this process is reversed; bow to your partner, the examiners and then to the Kamiza. (Just remember, bow to O-Sensei first and last!) The Instructors will call out specific techniques for you to perform, left side, right side, ura and omote. Keep performing the technique until the examiner calls out for a change in request or indicates that it is your partner's turn to demonstrate. If you mess up (and you might!) do not stop in the middle of your technique. Rather, complete the (wrong) technique and then perform the correct one next time.

The examiners are of course looking for technical proficiency consistent with the level for which you are testing. They are also looking for your ability to take proper ukemi and demonstrate proper focus while maintaining a state of calm alertness while under pressure. (This is when those breathing exercises really pay off!)

A final word on promotions: Aikido does not lend itself to a "ten easy lessons" approach. Do not be in a hurry to achieve rank. Use testing as a motivator to "ratchet up" your training but stay focused on the day to day, long term pace of your training and you will eventually achieve a deeper understanding of the art (and yourself) which no belt or certificate can adequately represent.

## 5.2

### **Rokukyu: 6th Kyu** Your first examination



**6th Kyu Examinations:** It may not seem so now, but you will come to know these terms in short order. The 6th Kyu examinations are held frequently—sometimes, in between classes or as part of the class—other times, as a part of a testing event. Check with your individual dojo.

**6th Kyu** (Rokukyu) 20 practice days since beginning

**Seiza** (a) **Bowing/Rei** (b) **Rise from seiza**

**Shikko\***

**Hanmi** (a) **Migi hanmi** (b) **Hidari hanmi**

**Ukemi** (a) **Ushiro ukemi** (1) **back fall** (2) **back roll\*** (b) **Mae ukemi\***

**Kokyu undo** (a) **Funakogi undo** (b) **Ikkyo undo**

**Tai sabaki** (a) **Tenkan** (b) **Irimi** (c) **Irimi tenkan** (d) **Tenshin**

**Hanmi** (w/partner) (a) **Ai hanmi** (b) **Gyaku hanmi**

**Atemi** (w/partner) (a) **Tsuki** (b) **Yokomenuchi** (c) **Shomenuchi**

**Tai no henko** (w/partner) as both uke and nage

**Kokyudosa**

## 5.3

**Gokyu: 5th Kyu**  
**Yonkyu: 4th Kyu**  
**Sankyu: 3rd Kyu**  
**Nikyu: 2nd Kyu**  
**Ikkyu: 1st Kyu**

examination requirements



**5th Kyu** (Gokyu) 40 practice days after 6th Kyu

Shomenuchi Ikkyo (omote & ura)

Shomenuchi Iriminage

Katatetori Shihonage (omote & ura)

Ryotetori Tenchinage (omote & ura)

Tsuki Kotegaeshi (tenkan)

Ushiro Tekubitori Kotegaeshi (omote & ura)

Morotetori Kokyunage (omote & ura)

**4th Kyu** (Yonkyu) 80 practice days after 5th Kyu

Shomenuchi Nikyo (omote & ura)

Yokomenuchi Shihonage (omote & ura)

Tsuki Iriminage (irimi, tenkan & tenshin variations)

Ushiro Tekubitori Sankyo (omote & ura)

Ushiro Ryokatatori Kotegaeshi (omote & ura)

Suwari waza:

Shomenuchi Ikkyo (omote & ura)

Katatori Nikyo (omote & ura)

Katatori Sankyo (omote & ura)

**3rd Kyu** (Sankyu) 100 practice days after 4th Kyu

Yokomenuchi Iriminage (3 variations)

Yokomenuchi Kotegaeshi (omote & ura)

Tsuki Kaitennage (omote & ura)

Ushiro Ryokatatori Sankyo (omote & ura)

Morotetori Iriminage (2 variations)

Shomenuchi Sankyo (omote & ura)

Suwari waza:

Shomenuchi Iriminage

Shomenuchi Nikyo (omote & ura)

Hanmi handachi:

Katatetori Shihonage (omote & ura)

Katatetori Kaitennage (uchi & soto mawari\*\*)

**2nd Kyu** (Nikyu) 200 practice days after 3rd Kyu  
Seminar attendance is encouraged

Shomenuchi Shihonage (omote & ura)

Shomenuchi Kaitennage (omote & ura)

Yokomenuchi Gokyo (omote & ura)

Ushiro Tekubitori Shihonage (omote & ura)

Ushiro Kubishime Koshinage (2 variations)

Ushiro Tekubitori Jujinage (omote & ura)

Morotetori Nikyo (omote & ura)

Hanmi handachi:

Shomenuchi Iriminage

Katatetori Nikyo (omote & ura)

Yokomenuchi Kotegaeshi (omote & ura)

Jiyu waza and Randori (2 attackers)

**1st Kyu** (Ikkyu) 300 practice days after 2nd Kyu  
Must attend two seminars per year

Katatori Menuchi – 5 Techniques

Yokomenuchi – 5 Techniques

Morotetori – 5 Techniques

Shomenuchi – 5 Techniques

Ryotetori – 5 Techniques

Koshinage – 5 Techniques

Hanmi handachi:

Ushiro waza – 5 Techniques

Tanto tori

Jiyu waza and Randori (3 attackers)

\*\*Uchi & Soto mawari—Both inside (Uchi) and outside (Soto) movements.

## 5.4

**Shodan: 1st Dan**  
**Nidan: 2nd Dan**  
**Sandan: 3rd Dan**  
examination requirements



**Shodan** 300 practice days after 1st Kyu  
Must attend two seminars per year

**All 1st Kyu Requirements**

**Tachi tori and Bokuto waza**

**Jo tori and Jo waza**

**Henka waza\*\*\***

**Jiyu waza and Randori** (4 attackers)

**Nidan** 600 practice days after Shodan / Not less than 2 years after Shodan  
Must attend two seminars per year

**All Shodan Requirements**

**Tachi tori** (2 attackers)

**Kaeshi waza\*\*\*\***

**Jiyu waza and Randori** (5 attackers)

**Sandan** 700 practice days after Nidan / Not less than 3 years after Nidan  
Must attend two seminars per year

**Subject of examination to be determined by examiner at the time of examination**

\*\*\***Henka waza**—Switching from one technique to another.  
Examiner will call the first technique.

\*\*\*\***Kaeshi waza**—Counter techniques. Uke applies the technique to Nage.  
Original technique will be called by examiner. (e.g., to apply Sankyo against Nikyo).

## 6.0

### Glossary: Aikido terms used in USAF dojo



**Japanese Words & Phrases:** Names of Techniques: It will help to know that most Aikido techniques are named in three parts, such as Shomenuchi Kaitennage Ura. The first word is uke's attack (shomenuchi = front strike to head); the second word is the Aikido technique to be performed by nage (kaitennage = arm-rotary throw); the third word is the direction in which the technique is performed (ura = behind).

**Aikikai** – Organizational name for Aikido Headquarters.

**Ai hanmi** – Uke/nage stand in same stance–mirrored.

**Ai uchi** – Literally 'mutual kill'–an entering movement.

**Atemi** – Strike.

**Ate** – Strike.

**Bokken (Bokuto)** – Wooden Japanese sword.

**Bokuto waza** – Techniques done while holding bokken.

**Budo** – Martial way.

**Bushido** – Way of the Warrior.

**Chi** – Earth.

**Chudan** – Middle position. As in Chudan no kamae.

**Dan** – Black belt level.

**Deshi** – Student.

**-soto-deshi** Outside student (not living at the dojo).

**-uchi-deshi** Live in student.

**Do** – Path or way.

**Dogi (gi)** – Training uniform.

**Dojo** – Literally place of the way.

**Dojo Cho** – The operational head of the dojo. A title.

**Doshu** – Head of the Way. A title.

**Domo Arigato Gozaimasu** – Formal thank you.

**Domo Arigato Gozaimashita** – Formal thank you for what has been received. Past tense.

**Dojo** – Training hall

**Dori/Tori** – Grab.

**Dozo** – Please. Go ahead, please continue.

**Fudoshin** – Unshakable, stable, centered.

**Fukushidoin** – First Level Instructor.

**Funakogi undo** – Rowing exercise.

**Gaeshi** – Turn back or reverse.

**Gedan** – Lower position. As in Gedan no kamae.

**Go no sen** – retreating action to lead uke–tenshin.

**Gokyo** – 5th wrist technique

**Gyaku hanmi** – Uke/nage stand in opposite stance

**Hai** – Yes

**Hakama** – Skirt-like pants worn over gi pants.

**Hanmi** – Balanced half stance, one foot forward.

**Hanmi handachi** – Kneeling defense, uke standing.

**Hantai** – Reverse.

**Happo undo** – Eight direction exercise.

**Hara** – Center, lower abdomen, center of gravity.

**Heijoshin** – Relaxed, natural state.

**Henka waza** – Switching from one technique to another.

**Hidari** – Left.

**Hiji** – Elbow.

**Hiza** – Knee.

**Hombu (Dojo)** – Aikido World Headquarters, Japan

**lie** – No.

**Ikkyo** – First wrist technique

**Irimi** – Entering.

**Jiyu Waza** – Interval attacks-nage varies techniques.

**Jo** – Japanese wooden weapon - a short staff.

**Jodan** – Upper position. As in Jodan no kamae.

**Jotori** – Staff take away, disarming.

**Jujinage** – Arm entwining throw.

**Kaeshi waza** – Counter techniques.

**Kakari keiko** – Same technique executed on several consecutive uke.

**Kamae** – Defensive stance with or w/o a weapon.

**Kamiza** – Top seat within dojo, located at the far right, while facing the dojo Shomen "shrine".

**Kaitennage** – Rotary throw - "turn to heaven".

**Kata** – Shoulder.

**Kata** – Predetermined sequences of movements used as a learning technique.

**Katatori** – Shoulder grab.

**Katatetori** – Single wrist grab.

**Keiko** – Practice, practice session.

**Keikogi (gi)** – Training uniform.

**Ken** – Sword.

**Ki** – Spirit, energy.

**Kiai** – A shout to focus one's energy.

**Kohai** – A junior to one who has trained longer and comes before. A matter of seniority but also an intangible awareness of place in the martial group.

**Kihon** – Something which is basic, fundamental.

**Kokyu** – Breath power.

**Kokyudosa** – Sitting exercise using breath power.

**Koshinage** – Hip throw.

**Kotegaeshi** – Wrist turn-out throw.

**Kubi** – Neck.

**Kubishime** – Choke hold.

**Kumitachi** – Paired sword training.

**Kyu** – All ranks below Dan level.

**Maai** – Spacing, proper distancing.

**Mae** – Front, forward.

**Mae ukemi** – Front roll.

**Makiotoshi** – Wrapping drop throw.

## 6.1

### Glossary: Aikido terms used in USAF dojo continued



**Mentsuki** – Closed fist punch to the head/face.  
**Menuchi** – Hand-blade strike to the top of the head.  
**Misogi** – Purification, mostly through breathing undo.  
**Migi** – Right.  
**Morotetori** – Two hands grab to one arm.  
**Mukyusha** – Those not yet having attained kyu rank.  
**Nage** – Throw, or the one who throws.  
**Nikyo** – 2nd wrist technique.  
**Obi** – Belt.  
**Omote** – Movement toward the front of uke.  
**Onegaishimasu** – May I be of service or please grant me this favor.  
**Randori** – Free style, random multiple attackers.  
**Rei** – Formal bow.  
**Reigi** – Etiquette or courtesy.  
**Ryo** – Both.  
**Ryokatatori** – Grabbing both shoulders.  
**Ryotetori** – Grabbing both wrists.  
**Sankyo** – Third wrist technique.  
**Sempai** – Student/Instructor above your rank. A person may be sempai to other kohai but they are also kohai or a junior student to someone else.  
**Sen no sen** – Immediate response–irimi.  
**Sensei** – Teacher.  
**Seiza** – Formal kneeling posture  
**Shido-in** – Instructor.  
**Shihan** – Senior Instructor.  
**Shihonage** – Four direction throw.  
**Shikaku** – Dead corner–uke's blind spot.  
**Shikko** – Knee walking.  
**Shizentai** – Standing with feet apart in line w/shoulders.  
**Shomen** – Front of dojo–O-Sensei picture resides there.  
**Shomenuchi** – Strike to the front of the head.  
**Shoshin** – Beginner mind.  
**Soto** – Outside.  
**Suburi** – Practice cutting action with a weapon.  
**Sumi otoshi** – Corner drop throw.  
**Suwari waza** – Kneeling techniques.  
**Tachi** – Long sword.  
**Tachi tori** – Disarming attacker of bokken.  
**Tachi waza** – Standing techniques.  
**Tai Sabaki** – Body movement.  
**Tanto** – Knife.  
**Te** – Hand.  
**Tegatana** – Hand blade.  
**Tekubi** – Wrist.  
**Ten** – Heaven.  
**Tenchinage** – Heaven & Earth throw.  
**Tenkan** – Turning.  
**Tenshin** – Nage retreats at a 45 degree angle–away from attack and creates a new angle to Uke.  
**Tsuki** – Forward closed fist punch.

**Uchi** – Inside.  
**Uchi-deshi** – Student living in the dojo.  
**Ude** – Arm.  
**Udekimenage** – Arm lock throw.  
**Uke** – The person receiving the technique (attacker).  
**Ukemi** – The knack or art of falling.  
**Ura** – Towards the back.  
**Ushiro** – Behind.  
**Ushiro ukemi** – Back fall or roll.  
**Ushiro Tekubitori** – Both wrists grabbed from behind.  
**Ushiro Kubishime** – Neck choke from behind.  
**Waza** – Techniques.  
**Yokomenuchi** – Strike to the side of the head.  
**Yonkyo** – Fourth wrist technique.  
**Yudansha** – Dan, black belt rank.  
**Yukyusha** – Kyu, not yet having attained black belt rank.  
**Zanshin** – Continuing awareness and centeredness–the follow through after executing a technique.

#### Aikido concepts:

**Masakatsu** – Victory of correctness, precision, righteousness.  
**Agatsu** – Victory over self.  
**Katsuhayahi** – Victory over light, over speed.

#### Japanese numbers:

**Ichi** – One.  
**Ni** – Two.  
**San** – Three.  
**Yon, shi** – Four.  
**Go** – Five.  
**Roku** – Six.  
**Shichi, nana** – Seven.  
**Hachi** – Eight.  
**Ku, kyu** – Nine.  
**Ju** – Ten.

#### Aikido foundation techniques:

**Ikkyo** – First form.  
**Nikyo** – Second form.  
**Sankyo** – Third form.  
**Yonkyo** – Fourth form.  
**Gokyo** – Fifth form.



**USAF web site:**

[www.usaikifed.com](http://www.usaikifed.com)

**USAF online newsletter:**

[www.usafaikidonews.com](http://www.usafaikidonews.com)

**USAF Summer Camp Facebook page:**

[www.facebook.com/pages/USAF-Summer-Camp/260768710114?ref=ts](https://www.facebook.com/pages/USAF-Summer-Camp/260768710114?ref=ts)

**Hombu Dojo:**

[www.aikikai.or.jp/eng/](http://www.aikikai.or.jp/eng/)