

There have been a few questions regarding the article in the last Obi on the forthcoming grading which need some clarification. The last AGM agreed that Kyu grading should be the responsibility of the individual dojo leaders, or any visiting chief instructor. They should not in general be part of a mini seminar. The idea behind this was that individual dojo leaders should take the responsibility for grading up to ikkyu and determining when students are ready to take Shodan. The same is true for dojos with higher Dan grades, it is still up to the dojo leader to decide when a student is ready for further grades, although there is general guidance presented below. In the case of a new dojo, or those with one, or no Dan grades then a visiting instructor/s should do the judging and/or give whatever assistance is required.

Brian Morrison and I adopted this principle for the recent Isle of Man and Northern Ireland seminars. We asked the dojo leaders to specify who they wanted to grade and to what level. We judged all Kyu and Dan grade challengers in the Isle of Man. However, we let the dojo leaders in Ireland judge the Kyu grades as we felt they had the necessary experience and knowledge, but Brian and I judged the Dan grades. We simply ratified their kyu grade decisions and added questions or comments when we wanted to test more deeply. Both dojos have been left Kyu Grade certificates for future internal gradings and we have every confidence in these dojo leaders being able to guide their students to Dan grade challenges at a future seminar. I believe Mark Sykes and Steve Watering are doing the same for the dojos they run or assist.

A general "rule of thumb" for the new Dan grades should be to teach their kyu grades as much as they feel each student can cope with and needs. In reality this should be at least all of the Omori Ryu forms. The students may not be able to do all of the forms very well by the time of their kyu grades, but they should be taught them all and allowed to demonstrate the 5 or 7 they feel most comfortable with. Simply teaching beginners 5 forms to pass early kyu grades and 7 forms for ikkyu is not recommended. Any visiting instructor worth their salt will spot this straight away. Really any student that doesn't at least know the outline, or shape, of all Omori Ryu forms shouldn't be thinking of doing a gradin .

Chief/senior instructors should therefore only be judging people for Dan grades at mini seminars that dojo leaders believe are ready for

the specific grade. This is as much a test of the dojo leader as the students, since if they send someone who is not yet ready for a grading it is a reflection of their own teaching and judging skills. It also means that we have more time for the primary reason for the seminar, ie practice and instruction, and this should be of more benefit to the students than performing a grading.

From memory, and my sparse notes after the discussions in August, the Sensei did not give us a "grade" for all the people at the embu never mind all those that attended the seminar! They simply stated what they believed the standard should be and what certain people were worth in their opinion. It is up to the chief instructors to decide people's grades in November not simply ratify the Sensei's recommendations. It is also up to them to teach people what they feel is relevant at seminars, it shouldn't just depend on students rank at the time. It is always beneficial to teach some of the lower grades Eishin Ryu, or Oku Iai, if they are really gifted and committed, otherwise we will lose their interest and support. I have seen a couple of young students who are currently Shodan that are practising Eishin Ryu and will be very good Sandans or Yondans in the not too distant future IF they continue their practice.

Tameshigiri, written papers, oral questioning, teaching demonstration and Tachi Uchi No Kurai are our own requirement. they did not come from the Sensei. It is also up to the chief and senior instructors to decide on these requirements at the time of the grading and will depend to a large extent on the number of people grading, their level, the availability of the makiwara, the venue and the time available. The general requirements are specified in the current handbook.

We will be phasing in the Tachi Uchi No Kurai for 3rd Dan and above over time. It has not been taught extensively to students, and is currently primarily practised only at the Leeds and Stoke dojo . I do not see how we can expect people to do it for the November grading if we have not given them any tuition. I will not be failing anyone at this stage for not being able to demonstrate a good knowledge of Tachi Uchi. This hopefully will change over the next year, or two, as partner work becomes a common part of most seminars/teaching sessions. It is a very important part of our school and to a good understanding of Iai.

There have also been a few concerns expressed about tameshigiri, as again people do not have much opportunity to practice this. It is actually making people reluctant to take gradings so it is something we need to work on over the next year, or two. However, it is imperative that people know how to cut properly and not just hack at the makiwara, therefore it will be part of the grading in November. Please do not be put off by this, we are not expecting perfection just that people make an honest effort and try to cut properly in a controlled manner. If you are not too familiar with tameshigiri simply say so and you will be given help and instruction.

Iwata Sensei suggested that the all the people at the front in the summer seminar should train together more often to help raise their overall standards and give a consistent demonstration when teaching. This makes sense.

From the material I handed out to all chief and senior instructors during, or immediately after the seminar, and restated by Terao Sensei at the airport the grading requirements are :

Shodan

Should be able to do all the Omori Ryu forms.

1 year gap

Nidan

Should be able to do all the Omori Ryu waza well.

2 year gap

Sandan

Must be able to do all the Eishin Ryu waza well..

3 year gap

Yondan

Must be able to do all the tate-hiza waza from Oku lai well.

4 year gap

Godan

Must be able to do all the tachi iai Oku lai waza, Bangai and all kae waza well

I do not remember, or have any notes, on Rokudan requirements, hence I do not know where they have appeared from.

The Sensei may think certain people are at, or about, this level but until we can get them to actually do a grading for us I do not see how anyone can be awarded such grade. If anyone simply awarded themselves, or calls themselves, Rokudan I think they deserve shooting. The sensei may think we are being very hard on you by giving the grades we do, but I think we are better off keeping our standards high, and people saying "hai".