

THE KYU EXAMINATION

The following information is intended for students, and parents of students, of the Shotokan Karate Club of Maryland (SKCM). We have a kyu examination scheduled every three months. Many students approach the examination with anxiety and reservation. Hopefully, the following information will help to comfort students, increase their knowledge about the exam process and dispel any misconceptions.

1. How long will the examination take?

For each student, the actual exam will take less than ten minutes. Students are tested in three areas; kihon (basic technique), kata and kumite (sparring). Typically, two to four students will test simultaneously. Students are asked to stand in staggered positions so the examiners can get a clear view of each examinee. Kihon and kata are performed first. Kumite usually follows a brief break.

2. Are the students at the exam from our dojo?

We have a few satellite clubs. Students attending the exam are from The Johns Hopkins University Karate Club, The Baltimore Karate Club and The Southern Maryland Karate Club. Usually, more than 75% of the students are from SKCM.

3. Who are the examiners and what are their qualifications?

***NOTE:** Sensei Amin is a certified examiner and is assisted by registered members of the ISKF Instructor Training Program.

All of the examiners at SKCM are registered members of the ISKF Instructors Training Program*. The program is a 3 year part time effort designed to qualify candidates as teachers, examiners, referees and judges. One must be a 2nd level black belt, age 22 to apply and must complete a rigorous academic schedule before graduation. Topics that cover a wide range of subjects including kinesiology, anatomy, psychology of karate and history of karate must be studied in detail. To complete the course, trainees are required to prepare 43 written reports and pass a series of practical

examinations.

4. Do the white belts and color belts test at the same exam?

Yes. The first students to perform are yellow belts. They provide an example for the new examinees. Their exam is in Japanese but the first time students are tested in English. Japanese is the international language. Whether training in Lebanon, Egypt, England or Brazil, Japanese is used during all formal events including seminars, demonstrations, examinations and tournaments.

5. What are the examiners looking for?

This varies depending on the level of the examinee. For first time students balance, posture and coordination are important. Can the student distinguish back stance from front stance? Is there excessive tension in the shoulders? Are the hips involved in each action? Can candidates concentrate and generate power appropriate for their level. The most important aspect is attitude. Karate is a martial art and as such one must take a very serious approach to training. Students must show respect for their art, the dojo, their fellow students and instructors. Students must strive to perform at their highest ability. Everyone has different gifts including strength, flexibility, speed and concentration. Each student is expected to exploit their talents and demonstrate body control.

6. What is the purpose of the examination?

Ideally, the exam is an opportunity for the students to perform and demonstrate what they have learned in the intervening quarter. Training in the dojo and taking the exam are much the same. In fact, each student has practiced the required drills hundreds of times prior to taking the exam. How does the student perform under pressure? Are the techniques second nature? Is the student intimidated by the process and is this reflected in their performance? Does the student perform with confidence? (Confidence comes only with repetition and regular training).

We all face difficult and stressful situations in our lives. This may happen at home, while driving, in a store, at work or in a public place. Will your training

allow you to take the appropriate action quickly and decisively? Our truest tests are likely to occur outside the dojo. With this perspective, students will hopefully see the kyu examination as a simple matter.

The exam also is an opportunity for the instructors to collectively evaluate their efforts. Are students improving? Are there glaring technical errors? How can we change the way we present the vast array of material? Should we focus on one particular concept to improve overall performance? The results of the exam help us to answer these important questions.

7. Will there be any contact during the examination. Is there a serious risk of injury?

The kumite (sparring) section of the examination is highly controlled and the drills are prearranged. Beginning students perform three step sparring exactly as practiced during class. More advanced students perform more difficult types of kumite since they have a better understanding of distance, timing, speed and blocking techniques. Contact is forbidden during kyu examinations and all students are asked to demonstrate good control.

8. How should students prepare for the examination?

Students' performance will reflect their cumulative effort. If they train twice a week, it will show. If they practice four times a week in class and twice a week at home, IT WILL SHOW! The examiners are very experienced and can discern which students are diligent. Every student that puts forth good effort and maintains a steady training regimen will get a grading that is commensurate with their level of commitment.

Relaxation exercises may be helpful during the days leading up to the exam. Students should find a quiet place, close their eyes and envision themselves performing each movement precisely, with confidence. On the day of the exam, arrive early enough to warm up thoroughly and practice. During the exam, remain calm, breath in a natural and comfortable pattern and try to enjoy the experience.

9. Should students train the day before the examination?

Students may elect to train for a very brief period (15-20 minutes). Anything more elaborate may lead to fatigue and impair performance the following day. The most important point is to avoid any injury. While training the day before an exam may boost confidence and help psychologically, it's not likely to enhance physical performance at the exam. Make no attempt to radically change techniques at the last minute. This may prove to be counterproductive and confusing.

10. How long will it take to earn a black belt (shodan)?

It takes the average student 3-4 years of regular training to attain black belt. Nowadays it's difficult to define the average student. Some students are unusually dedicated and can reach this level in 2 years. Others students due to work, recurrent injuries, relocation etc. may take several years to reach shodan. Enjoy the journey. At each step you will learn new techniques, find new challenges and most importantly learn much more about yourself.

11. Why do green belts and higher ranking purple belts often get asked to perform the same techniques?

It's not uncommon for students at different levels to perform the same techniques during an exam. Students at various levels have a much different understanding of application, timing and body mechanics. While the techniques may be the same, the execution should reflect a greater technical knowledge.

12. When can a student learn new kata?

Each change of belt color (yellow, orange, green, purple & brown) means learning a new kata. As you advance, the katas, the techniques and the sparring requirements become more difficult. There are a few exceptions to this trend. Once you have received your new rank, you may begin learning the new kata immediately. However, you should also review your previous katas at least 2-3

times per week. Each new kata builds on the previous pattern so that constant review adds depth and meaning to the newest kata.

13. Is there any significance to the belt colors?

Ideally, the colors get progressively darker as one gains more knowledge. Obviously, black belt is the last stage. Years ago, students wore white, green, brown and black belts. Eventually yellow, orange and purple were added. In Japan, some universities clubs only have white and black belts. Students keep their white belts until they are ready for shodan. History suggests that long ago students kept the white belts until they turned dark from use and by then had accumulated enough knowledge and experience to be awarded a black belt.

14. Will the rank be honored in other dojos?

A students' rank will be acknowledged in any ISKF affiliated dojo in the US or around the world. Our chief instructor is very popular world wide. Just the mention of Master Okazaki's name will open most doors in the karate world.

15. How will a student with experience in another style be examined?

Each style has its similarities and distinguishing features. One must learn the katas commensurate with each level. The student may be given a series of exams. A candidate's performance at each level will determine their final rank. We make every attempt to award rank appropriately and tutor students extensively from other styles prior to taking the exam.

16. How many training days are required prior to testing?

Each student must be familiar with level appropriate skills and techniques. The second exam is conducted in Japanese/therefore students should be familiar with basic Japanese terminology. Beginners are required to train approximately 25 days before the first examination. Thereafter, students are urged to practice at home and be consistent in their attendance. Normally, students with the best attendance perform the best.

17. What is a kyu and how are the exam results determined?

The term "kyu" loosely translated mean level or rank. A 9th kyu is a novice and a 1st kyu is the highest level brown belt. All students progress from 9th to 1st kyu and once the black belt is attained, the rank is referred to as "dan".

The examiner rates each student in three categories of performance; kata, kihon and kumite. After the test, the examiners confer to discuss their individual ratings and form a consensus. The chief- examiner renders the final decision.

18. Are allowances made for age and physical limitations?

The examiners understand that certain abilities diminish with advancing age. The average 50 year old doesn't have the speed and agility of a teenager. A 55 year old brown belt will have the same technical knowledge as a twenty year old of equal rank. However, his execution will be age appropriate. The examiner tries to discern whether a student applies maximum effort given their limitations. If a chronic hip injury constricts ones' range of motion, the mechanics of the kick may be unorthodox. Despite these limitations, execution should reflect sound knowledge of basic technique.

19. Are results determined by comparing students testing for equivalent rank?

While it is natural to make comparisons among age and skill matched students, examiners want to see significant progress from the previous exam. It would be unfair to compare students with unequal natural ability. The most important element is effort and ones' commitment to training and overall development.

Karate is much like any endeavor. A student can take a passive role or an active role. If one reads, asks questions, experiments and trains diligently, development will be accelerated. The body will adapt with regular practice and ones' skill will increase

significantly. Along the way, there may be mild injuries and setbacks as there are with any physical exercise. Don't be dissuaded by occasional setbacks in your development. Karate, like most martial arts, tends to be monotonous since we practice the same techniques repeatedly. Each punch, kick and strike, brings the body one step closer to perfection. Don't let boredom hinder development. Perseverance will bring rewards. Students ultimately learn about their bodies and develop self confidence while maintaining an excellent level of overall fitness.