

Dojo Etiquette & Procedures

Welcome to the Ku-ring-gai Aikido Dojo!

If this is your first experience of practising a Japanese martial art, we welcome you to our dojo (training hall or place for learning the way). This information sheet will provide answers to some of the most common questions about the Ku-ring-gai Aikido Dojo.

We want your practice here to be a safe and happy, so we ask you to familiarise yourself with the information on safety, dojo etiquette, dues, maintenance, weapons practice, seminars and our procedures. Of course, it can't cover every situation that may arise, so you are always welcome to ask questions of any yudansha (black belt graded student), your sempai (more senior student), the sensei (teacher) or send questions via email to info@aikido.com.au.

This dojo is a member of Aikido Australia the business name of our Aikido association, the Takemusu Aikido Association Inc. Our sensei, Derek Minus 5th dan, established this dojo 30 years ago. His Aikido teacher of 35 years, Saburo Takayasu shihan is the head of the Association. The Association is a not-for-profit organisation that provides administrative support, advertising, insurance and assistance with the running of the individual clubs, like the Ku-ring-gai Dojo.

This pamphlet is not the only resource that is available to our students. The club maintains its own website at www.aikido.com.au, which contains a great deal of historical and technical information. (See in particular the "Resources" page.) The Association website is located at www.aikidoaus.com.au and it also has information about Aikido and the Iwama Dojo and other association dojos in NSW. We also have a web-based resource site where video and PDF versions of articles are shared for research purposes.

Entering the Dojo

Aim to arrive at the dojo 10 to 15 minutes before class begins to give yourself time to change and assist with laying out the mats and preparing the dojo for class.

Upon entering or leaving the dojo make a standing bow towards the picture of O'Sensei at the front of the dojo (*shomen*). The change rooms are downstairs (for men) and upstairs (for women). Toilet facilities are located both at the back of the hall and downstairs.

Please leave your shoes on until you are ready to step onto the mats, when they are removed.

Note: For security purposes keys and other valuables should not be left in the change areas but are best left in or near your shoes.

Keeping Our Dojo Clean

This dojo is everyone's practice space. Therefore it is our responsibility as dojo members to keep it clean. We clean the dojo before and after class every day. This includes (but is not limited to):

- Sweeping the floor
- Laying out the mats before class and putting them away after class
- Washing the mats before class (and after class if needed)
- Setting up the shomen (scroll stand) and weapons rack

Training Uniforms

If you are new and do not yet own a keiko-gi (training uniform) wear a t-shirt or other comfortable shirt for practice and loose fitting long pants (that cover the knees). Short pants are not recommended because we often practice techniques in suwariwaza (on our knees) or practice shikko (knee walking).

The dojo does not keep a stock of keiko-gi for purchase but does have an association with a local martial arts retailer in the Gladesville area that sells the most common (quality) brands. You can borrow our trade discount card, which entitles you to receive a discount (generally around 10%). But you are encouraged to shop around and find the best price/quality keiko-gi for your budget.

Once you have your own keiko-gi, keep it clean. They are designed to absorb the sweat and need to be washed frequently particularly in warmer months. If your keigo-gi is torn make sure it is repaired.

Remember: it is no disrespect to have a well worn and fraying keiko-gi, but it is to have a dirty one.

Begin with Respect

Every time we step onto or off the mat we make a respectful standing bow toward the kamidana (front of the dojo). This symbolizes our respect for the spirit and principles of Aikido and our gratitude to the Founder for developing this system of study.

Please make every effort to arrive on time for class. If possible, please be on the mat five minutes before class, quiet and ready to begin training.

If you arrive late, here is the procedure to follow before joining class:

- step on the mat and bow toward the kamidana
- kneel down and make the formal bow
- wait for sensei to invite you to join class
- find a partner/s, bow into them and begin training.

Practising Safely

When registering, fill out the statement of medical problems that may affect your Aikido practice fully and carefully and keep the information on it up to date. If need be, get medical advice about a condition before beginning practice – you may be asked to provide a medical release from your practitioner. Properly assessing your risk before you begin practice is our legal responsibility and makes good sense to see that you do not inadvertently suffer further injury. We want your practice of Aikido to be as safe as we can make it.

If you have an injured or recovering body part let the teacher know, so that they can avoid techniques which may exacerbate your injury.

Remove all jewellery before getting on the mat, with the possible exception of wedding rings. Keep toenails and fingernails trimmed. Long nails can easily cause cuts during practice.

If you find blood on yourself, stop practice to wash and bandage any cut. Ask your sensei to use the Club's **First Aid kit** where you will find band-aids and other first aid supplies.

If you find blood on the mat, immediately inform your partner and sensei, and then excuse yourself to clean it up. We have a "blood bucket" with gloves and disinfectant to ensure that no blood-based pathogens are released.

If for any reason you do not feel safe with your training partner, feel free to ask them to be slower or gentler with you. If you still do not feel safe, bow to your partner and let them know you are choosing to sit out. Immediately advise the sensei of the problem.

When a technique is not working for you, do not increase the power with which you are performing it. This approach will only lead to injury to yourself or your partner. Our practice is to grip as hard as you can – but if the partner cannot perform the technique, to then release a third of that power, and then another third until they can perform it easily.

Our basic practice method (kihon) stresses slow and careful movement under pressure. Rushing the technique or using excessive force will inhibit your development. Saito Sensei always stressed that we should perform each technique, slowly. Carefully and methodically. To allow your form to grow and develop you need to practice just at a physical level but also mentally examine the movement you are making and seek to find a refined effortless way to move in concert with power.

Do your best to be prepared for a full hour of training. That is, make sure you are adequately hydrated and have taken care of your personal needs before class begins. However, your safety and comfort are important – if you need to use the toilets, take a drink of water or do anything else to maintain safe training, please do so after letting sensei know why you are leaving the mat.

Class Format

When class begins, all students line up and sit in seiza facing the shomen. Students line up according to rank, most senior to least senior from right to left. This is the only time during practice that we sit in rank order.

Sensei will come to the center of the dojo, we then all bow to O Sensei, clap twice, bow again. Sensei then turns to the class and bows to the students saying "Onegai shimasu" (which, roughly translated, means "thank you for what we are about to do"). At that point, the students bow and respond by saying back to sensei "Onegai shimasu" (pronounced "oh-ney-guy-she-masoo").

Sensei will then lead the class in basic practice exercises *tai-no-henka* and *morote dori kokyu nage* for about 10 to 15 minutes. If sensei is late, one of the senior students will lead the practice.

The class proceeds with sensei demonstrating each technique that is to be practised. Observe the demonstration diligently. You are expected to practice the technique as it was shown when sensei indicates it is time to practise. At that point you will turn to a partner near you, bow and say "Onegai shimasu".

Quickly find a space on the mat and practice the technique with the senior student as *nage* (performing the technique) and junior student as *uke* (receiving the technique). Practice both left hand and right hand sides. Then switch roles and repeat the same attack and technique.

When the end of a technique practice session is signalled by sensei, immediately bow to your partner, thank them, then line up and sit in seiza as quickly as possible.

It is preferable to sit in seiza whenever you are sitting on the mat. Sit in seiza as long as you can, and switch to sitting cross legged if you need to relieve the pressure on your knees and ankles. Never lounge against a wall, or stretch your legs out in front of you. Endeavour to keep your spine straight whenever you are seated.

If there are an odd number of students in the class you may find yourself without a training partner. In this situation, choose a pair who are working together and bow in to them. The pair practicing is then responsible for noticing and practicing the technique with you as well. After each partner has practiced the technique once on each side, the person who was just *uke* will rotate out, and you rotate in beginning as *uke*.

Talking on the Mat

Sensei means teacher or instructor and whoever is teaching class is addressed formally as sensei. We use this term, in part, to remind ourselves that this is a practice that begins and ends with respect (*rei*). The sensei is the only teacher on the mat. There is no need for other teachers; therefore talking during training should be kept to a minimum.

If you need assistance with a technique, approach sensei and politely ask for instruction. Do not call the instructor over to you from across the room.

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Do not attempt to correct or instruct your training partner that is the role of the sensei, who has introduced the technique. Each student contains the principles of Aiki within themselves. Our partner does not need our instruction. We need to trust that they will figure out a move for themselves, or we may need to work on our humility by considering that they could be working on something we are unaware of.

Every time we want to speak, we could benefit by inquiring into what lesson we can learn by keeping our own counsel. And last but not least, we might just be plain wrong. We would not want to lead our partner astray.

We do not offer advice or criticism to our sempai. Sempai means "senior student," that is, senior compared to you. Kohai means "junior student," again, compared to you. We might occasionally offer small comments to our kohai, even though we should try to refrain from these comments.

Use your body, rather than words, to help your training partner discover proper movements.

Practice is the best instructor.

At the End of Class

When the sensei signals, "aware-masu" the class ends, and all students line up and quickly sit in seiza. Sensei will lead everyone in a bow to O Sensei, clap twice, bow again, and turn to bow to the students. At that point the students bow and say "Domo arigato gozaimashita" (pronounced "Doe-moe ah-ree-gah-toe go-zie-mash-tah.) This is a very polite form of thank you.

Sensei will then mention any dojo business, upcoming seminars, gradings, and days when the dojo may be closed or other events of note

Grading

The examination system in Aikido is not structured on competition. Instead you are expected to demonstrate your understanding of the techniques by testing for rank. Testing generally occurs every six months in February/March and August/September.

A test fee of \$30 for yellow belt and \$40 for brown belt is charged (part of which goes directly to Takayasu Sensei) to cover testing, administrative expenses and issuing your certificate. The test fee and a completed application must be prepared and paid prior to the test date.

Refer to the grading syllabus, which is on the website (see the Resources page) for the requirements for each rank. When you believe that you are ready to undertake a grading exam, speak with one of the instructors and seek help from your sempai with your test preparation. You will need to successfully demonstrate the required techniques, and know the Japanese names of the techniques. You must also satisfy the minimum practice hour requirements for each grade.

Seminars

There will be ongoing announcements and notices posted about aikido seminars being offered at various dojos in our general area. You are strongly encouraged to attend seminars, no matter what the level of your training.

Each month a special seminar, the Aikido Beginners Course, is taught for all adults who have not practised Aikido before. The aim of the course is to develop an understanding of the basic forms and safe methods of practice.

The Women's Warrior Weapons course is a special program to teach women how to protect themselves. Aikido principles and the use of a short stick is taught.

Social Events

After class on the second Monday of each month is the traditional time to go out for a beer (or lemonade, or soda) and socialize with classmates off the mat. All are welcome, friends and family, too, if they wish to join us at the Pymble Pub, just down the road from the dojo.

And, during weekend seminars we usually have a social gathering on a Saturday night, at a restaurant. These events are open to all dojo members, their families and significant others. Social events are announced during after-class circle, via email and often a flyer is posted as well.

Weapons

Weapons practice is an important part of our Aikido training for students of all ranks. A special weapons class is conducted each Sunday at 8am to 10 am in the Robert Pymble Park (near the Pymble Railway station.)

Weapons are provided by the dojo for weapons classes. Dojo weapons are stored in the weapons rack downstairs in the change-room. These weapons are for beginners and for times when you have forgotten your own practice weapons.

Do NOT use someone else's weapons unless they have given you direct permission to do so. When you are ready you can purchase your own bokken, jo and tanto (or short stick) from the dojo.

A "makewara" is also located in the change-room. Learn how to use it for self-practice.

For Parents

We welcome your choice to bring your children to learn Aikido at the Ku-ring-gai Dojo.

We have some rules to make your child's practice a pleasant and safe affair:

1. Please be EARLY. Allow your child time to settle and prepare themselves for the lesson. But do not just drop your child outside the dojo and leave until you have checked that the dojo is open that night.
2. Make sure your children (especially if they are young) visit the toilet before the class commences. It is very disruptive for everyone if they have to leave the mat to visit the toilet during the class.
3. Make sure that your child's fingernails and toenails are clean and trimmed. Also no watches or jewellery should be worn.
4. If your child has long hair please tie it back. If they are rolling and tumbling it won't be stepped on or get caught.
5. Aikido is traditionally practiced in a "keiko-gi". This is a white unadorned cotton uniform. Please DO NOT send your children dressed in training uniforms from other arts, e.g. karate, tae-kwon do etc. If you wish to re-use their previous clothing, please remove all insignia.
6. If they do not have a keiko-gi then clothing should be loose fitting (a T-shirt is fine) and pants should be long enough to cover and protect the knees.
7. All training is conducted on special mats. To keep the mats clean shoes must always be taken off but only when they get on and off the mats. It is best to provide your child with some form of slippers or sandals which they can easily take on or off as required.
8. Please pick up your child on time as the dojo will close and we have no facilities to mind children. Make sure we have your (mobile) phone number, if for some reason we need to contact you.
9. Please advise your child that friendly behaviour and good discipline are most important in Aikido to ensure safe practice.

Training Fees

The Ku-ring-gai Aikido Dojo is not a business. However, we have to meet the expense of the hall rental and purchase of mats and equipment. To do this all students under the rank of nidan (second grade black belt) are asked to contribute a monthly fee.

When you join the dojo, an envelope will be made up in your name. Payments can be made by cash, cheque or bank transfer.

If you are paying by cash, place the correct amount for the payment in the envelope with your name provided and hand it to sensei. Be sure to indicate how much you are paying and for what month. Do not hand sensei cash or expect that he will be able to give you the correct change. Organise this before offering your payment.

Fees can be paid each month, by school term (4 per year), or half-yearly with consequent savings. For more details on fees and various discount rates, see the website page, "Training Fees".