



| TRADITIONAL  
| AIKIDO EUROPE

**GRADING SYLLABUS  
AND RATIONALE**

- |     |    |     |     |                          |
|-----|----|-----|-----|--------------------------|
| 1.  | 座技 | 横面打 | 一~五 |                          |
|     |    |     |     | SUWARI-WAZA YOKOMEN UCHI |
| 2.  | 半身 | 半立  |     | HANMI-HANTACHI           |
| 3.  | 四方 | 投   |     | SHIHŌ-NAGE               |
| 4.  | 小手 | 返   |     | KOTE-GAESHI              |
| 5.  | 呼吸 | 投   |     | KOKYU-NAGE               |
| 6.  | 入身 | 投   |     | IRIMI-NAGE               |
| 7.  | 腰  | 投   |     | KOSHI-NAGE               |
| 8.  | 後  | 技   |     | USHIRO-WAZA              |
| 9.  | 短刀 | 取   |     | TANTŌ-DORI               |
| 10. | 太刀 | 杖取  |     | TACHI-DORI<br>JO-DORI    |
| 11. | 自由 | 技   |     | JIYU-WAZA<br>二人掛り        |

初段審査

Shodan test as displayed at the Iwama Dojo, Ibaraki, Japan, under the late Saito Morihiro Sensei 9th Dan.

- photo courtesy of Eric Savalli

## Introduction

The shodan test in this Syllabus is based on the standard test Saito Morihiro Sensei would give in the Iwama Dojo in Japan in the 1970's till his death in 2002 (see photo on previous page). Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros drew up the essence of the present examination system in the early 1990's when he was an Aikikai examiner under Saito Morihiro Sensei with the Iwama shodan test at the heart of the Syllabus. The weapon sections were added from the separate weapons system of grading that Sensei created around that time.

Kyu ranks are a progression towards shodan and the ranks beyond are an extension with shodan and nidan forming a pair focused on kihon static techniques and sandan and yondan grades completing the basic training with ki no nagare and more advanced techniques from the full curriculum.

Ranks are divided into 6 kyu ranks (white belt) and 10 dan ranks (black belt). The hakama is worn from 3rd, 1st kyu or shodan as decided by individual Dojo Cho's within the association. At the Kyu level Dojo Cho's should consider each student individually and award grade either through testing or recommendation as appropriate in each case.

At the dan level examinations are required up to and including yondan and are carried out by the members of the examination committee with the candidate's instructor in attendance. Dan ranks are Aikikai recognised ranks.

Dan examination candidates need to be in regular disciplined training and are advised to have attended three full seminars in the 18 months prior to the exam (by any senior Aikido teacher nationally or internationally) preferably outside of their own dojo's. This is to ensure that candidates during their preparation not only step outside of their comfort zone and challenge themselves beyond the confines of their regular group but also are exposed to other teachers to give them different perspectives on their practice and challenge their understanding and ability in different ways.

For testing and grading costs please consult with instructors.

### *General Dan Grade Committee:*

The examination committee consists of at least one of the Aikikai recognised examiners within TAE in addition to at least one more senior member. The candidate's instructor should ideally be present but has no say in the decision making process.

### *Special Dan Grade Committee:*

This committee is composed of all the Rokudans within TAE and is responsible for the promotion of senior ranks beyond yondan (see Godan requirements below).



## Testing rationale and objectives

The Syllabus can be understood as both a roadmap to acquiring the basic techniques and as a check on one's level of progress in the understanding and embodiment of the Principles of Aikido. Technique and Principle should be understood as two interrelated aspects with Technique the outer form and Principle the inner dynamic that gives life and meaning to the practice.

The grades can be broadly divided into four main areas as discussed below:

- 6 – 4 kyu
- 3 – 1 kyu
- Shodan – Yondan
- Godan and above

### 6th – 4th kyu

The emphasis at this entry level is on developing ukemi and footwork plus a clear sense of direction and basic movement skill (front and back, entering and turning) in the context of basic solid technique (kihon waza) both with weapons and empty-handed training. Attacks at the 'grasping' level are emphasised (katate, morote, ryote, kata dori) and the basic format for aikido training, that of a ritualised agreement (kata) where attacker and receiver take turns practicing prearranged techniques (nage and uke format) is established.

At the body level the focus is on coordinating hands and feet and relaxing the body weight downwards into the ground as the principle of being balanced is emphasised throughout.

### 3rd – 1st Kyu

Ukemi, footwork and being balanced remain the primary focus points. Once the periphery of the body (hands and feet) are more coordinated and the weight is more 'underneath', further Principles such as being whole and coordinated and being centered are explored along with the Relational Principles of non-resistance, joining and following (awase), which receive more focused attention.

The objective by 1st kyu is to have a clear idea as to the basic techniques as well as a clear idea of the primary principles governing body use, relationship and the generation of power (kokyu ryokyu). 1st kyu is essentially a pre-test for shodan and thus the requirements for this next exam should be consulted when preparing for 1st kyu.



## Shodan – Yondan

### Shodan: Katai (solid)

Shodan literally translates as ‘first step’ and at this first level the emphasis is on the solid development of the kihon (katai kihon) forms. Technique should be solid and clear, grounded, heavy and balanced. The basic principles of body use (being grounded, being integrated and balanced, being centered and calm) and the basic relational principles (listening, joining, connecting and leading) are not just abstract ideas but can be distinguished in one’s experience, albeit at a ‘first level’.

Shodan is the culmination of the training and development undergone through the kyu ranks. As such, at this level the following aspects, which are introduced to the student from the very beginning of training, should form a solid framework for practice and all future development.

- **Uke-nage** format of training: Kata is understood as a cooperative effort where uke gives nage measured pressure in his attacks and nage measures the power of his techniques in accordance with uke’s ability to take ukemi. In this sense this training format is a cooperative engagement and precludes competition. There are no winners or losers, only learners.
- **Levels:** Basic solid to more flowing dynamic with everything in between.
- **Awase:** What harmonising with an opponent ‘is’ and is ‘not’. An understanding of the Principle of Non-Resistance.
- **Kokyu ryokyu:** ‘Whole body power’. The power we are seeking to develop in Aikido is a ‘whole body power’ generated from our connection with the ground, directed through our center and expressed through our hands (or any other peripheral contact point). This power, and to the extent that we are able to generate it, should be clearly distinguished from using part of our body in isolation to bring about a result (commonly known as ‘forcing’).
- **Intention:** To understand that Aikido is not a means whereby opponents are simply defeated but that it is a martial art whose ideal is the restoration of harmony beyond the opposites of winning and losing. The ultimate aim of training in Aikido is not to be just an effective fighter, but to not have to fight at all. However this ideal is not attained by avoiding conflict and hard training but by entering it directly and going through and thus beyond it. It must not be forgotten that to be able to overcome an aggressive adversary with Aiki entails that the martial and mental skill of the aikidoka are superior to those of the attacker. In this sense Aikido is a Budo.



## **Nidan: Yawarakai (flexibility / suppleness)**

The emphasis remains on the kihon solid level but the 'hardness' and 'sharpness' that were more predominant in the techniques at shodan have their 'edges taken off'. The exam is essentially the same as for shodan with a few technical additions but now the form should be 'smoother', more flexible and supple in execution. Balance and connection are 'deeper'. The development from shodan is one of going toward more 'internal' in both feeling and hence technical execution.

## **Sandan: Nagare (flowing)**

After the first two levels, which focus on clear solid basics at the static level, the emphasis at sandan is on taking the 'yawarakai' quality developed at nidan into movement. The main issue here is not only the 'heavy underneath' quality of one's movement with its inherent sense of deeper balance but also being able to maintain connection at three fundamental levels: with the ground, with oneself and with the other – and to know when connection at any one of these levels is lost, and hence make the appropriate corrections in real time.

## **Yondan: Ki no Nagare (flow of ki)**

Yondan is the last rank for which extensive technical examinations are carried out. Upon reaching yondan in essence the first stage of basic training has been completed (although this never ends as such). The instructor who up to this point has been serving as a guide and 'mirror' for the student's experience and learning process is no longer necessary for further development. The student can now mirror his or her own experience and evaluate accurately the feedback received from his or her actions. He or she has learned 'how to learn'.

From a technical perspective, at yondan one should have a detailed knowledge of the Aikido technical repertoire plus a full understanding of the various levels of practice (kihon, kinonagare, henka, oyo, kaeshi and takemusu aikido) in addition to a firm understanding of the principles that give the techniques their power and the art its meaning.

Yondan completes the basic training level of the art.



## Consciousness Development in Aikido

Mind and body are not considered as being separate in the martial arts but as inseparable aspects of our experience. The progression through the ranks above is also a progression of greater sensitivity, not only on the physical level but on the mental as well. Specifically we seek to develop and deepen the following basic mental states (among others):

**Isshin.** To be able to focus attention intensely, making a 'feeling-connection' with our partners whole body.

**Zanshin.** To be able to maintain a broad awareness which registers the changes in our environment beyond the immediate engagement demands of the moment. This awareness should take in and fill out the six basic directions: above and below, front and back, left and right.

**Mushin.** To be able to remain calm and clear under pressure. To appreciate that 'calmness' is not an action we take to manipulate ourselves but is our natural state once reactivity is abandoned.

'Reactivity' here is defined as a defensive reflex based on self preservation which does not take into account the broader parameters of the situation. An action that does take these into account in a balanced and responsible way and is hence a more intelligent action, we call a 'response'. Aikido techniques, born as they are from an ethical position of seeking resolution to conflict rather than increasing it, are examples of 'inspired responses'.

These three 'states' that consciousness can take (among many others): focus, openness and calmness should be felt as increasingly accessible as we progress in the art, particularly at the more advanced levels. These are states we access regularly in daily life, but in Aikido we seek to develop them further by honing them under pressure and making them more accessible under stress.

An increasingly refined consciousness of the perceptual distinctions within the following domains of relational experience:

- **The physical aspects** of an engagement: weight, centre (high or low, diffuse or concentrated, contained or expressed, etc), distance, angles, direction, speed, momentum, 'body-feel' (the feeling of density or lightness within our own and our partner's body), sensitivity to 'chain-locking' our partners articulatory system within techniques, etc.
- **The energetic aspects:** vibrant and full or weak and dull. Expanded or contracted. Sharp or soft. Low or high, etc
- **The mental/emotional aspects:** present and focused or absent and/or dissipated. Calm or agitated. Aggressive, defensive, defeated, afraid, confused, hidden, etc.

None of the above relational distinctions are new as we perceive them in daily life all the time. Our task in Aikido is to become more conscious of these aspects and not to make the assumption that our levels of ability and degree of sensitivity in these matters is a given and is therefore 'fixed'. As we progress in the Art and as our trajectory of development becomes more 'internal', it becomes clear that the endless work of improving our technique is dependent and driven by the changes we make on the more subtle mental and energetic aspects of our experience.



## Godan and Rokudan requirements

Recommendation for these senior grades takes place once a year to Hombu Dojo with the grade being awarded at the January 12th Kagamibiraki ceremony in Hombu Dojo, Tokyo, Japan.

*As stipulated in the introduction to the Grading Syllabus all dan candidates to be eligible need to be in regular training (at least twice weekly) and have participated in three full seminars in the previous 18 months.*

*Godan candidates require a minimum period of 5 years as Yondan and Rokudan candidates a minimum 6 years as Godan (in reality, these times are generally much longer).*

The differences between 5th and 6th Dan can be summarised as follows:

In the Technical requirements outlined below there is a maturation from 5th to 6th evident in such Principles as centre-work, dynamic balance, coordination, soft and clear engagement (awase), greater effortless whole body power, a clear and calm non-reactive embodiment of Principles through Technique is a matter of training and maturation and evident as having developed from 5th to 6th dan.

At the level of contribution, especially 6th Dan candidates need to be engaged in the activities mentioned below under 'Contribution Requirements' to a further degree than at 5th Dan.

### 1. Technical requirements.

The journey of one's development as an Aikidoka has been described above through the Dan grades from Shodan to Yondan (please review) and should simply continue through into the Senior Dan levels. This journey is essentially one of increasing development from a more external to a more internally dominated Aikido. Along with Technique which expresses this development, the basic mental states and perceptual distinctions discussed above should also be evident in one's Aikido. Beyond that, a thorough understanding of the system as to levels and how they all fit together is required.

### 2. Contribution requirements.

We do not just practice Aikido for ourselves. From the beginning by the very nature of the practice we see that we learn collaboratively. In essence every one of us is both student and teacher with every partner we train with and in every class we take part in. From the outset we learn this art in relationship with one another.

At these levels, this basic contribution takes on further dimensions such as teaching classes, sitting on organisation/dojo boards and work committees, organising and teaching seminars, performing in demonstrations and supporting Aikido in various ways beyond the dojo at both national and international levels. Activity and engagement in contributing to Aikido in these various ways is required for grades 5th Dan and above.





### **3. Character.**

As is clear from the above, mind and body, technique and principle are not separate in Aikido but reflect each other. Aikido as a Japanese Budo is not just about training martial technique but about self development in the sense of promoting mental well being, balance, humility, integrity, honesty, empathy and a strong moral compass. As required by the Aikikai organisation and by TAE, candidates are also evaluated at this level.

*To injure an opponent is to injure yourself. To control aggression without inflicting injury is the Art of Aikido. Morihei Ueshiba.*

### **4. Demonstration.**

This can be freely chosen by the candidate and should be a clear and personal expression of their understanding and ability in Aikido.

### **5. Interview by Special Dan Grade Committee TAE**

A final interview is held where the above is both assessed plus other more subjective measures are considered. A final decision on the grade is reached by consensus within the grading committee.



## In conclusion

The kyu ranks introduce and build up an understanding of the principles of Aikido via the basic techniques both at kihon as well as flowing levels. This will bring the student to the 'first step' of shodan where all the basic elements for further growth in Aikido are in place.

The testing emphasis underlying the first four dan ranks is as follows with the more senior ranks (Godan and above) deepening the ability and knowledge attained through these levels.

- kata kihon: hard solid basic
- yawarakai kihon: supple basic
- nagare: flowing
- ki no nagare: flow of ki

These four distinctions within the traditional two levels of kihon and ki no nagare practice were often used by Saito Morihiro Sensei in his teachings and represent a progression of qualitative development when practice is done correctly and mindfully.

The main difference between the last two levels is that at the nagare level the emphasis is on a solid 'thick' fluid connection maintained throughout movement. At the last level this connection is further refined as to timing, distance (ma-ai) and connection (ki musubi) such that the connection and control from center to center can seem almost 'without physical contact' at times as the energetic and mental aspects of control and connection are emphasised. This is the most difficult level to explain well. The experience with Saito Morihiro Sensei was that simply upon initiating an attack the feeling was that of being instantly 'smothered' and unable to move freely as Sensei would seem to have immediate control over uke's center and intent.

This is obviously a very advanced level of connection and control and at Yondan there should be 'glimpses' of this ability, which should give a sense of direction and possibility for future development.

The Founder of Aikido, Morihei Ueshiba, has further illustrated these qualities with the following poem:

*Techniques employ four qualities  
that reflect the nature of our world.  
Depending on circumstance  
you should be  
hard as a diamond,  
flexible as a willow,  
smooth flowing like water,  
or as empty as space.*

*- Morihei Ueshiba*



Development in Aikido is endless and the above Syllabus with its various levels are merely guidelines in a process of growth. Beyond Yondan, Aikido is a matter of continuing insights into Aiki both in regular training at one's dojo and in the greater dojo of everyday life. The further one develops in Aikido the more one leaves behind any ideas or ambitions as to attainment of any kind. 'Beginner's mind' (shoshin), humility and gratitude are the real hallmarks and fruits of sustained, committed and sincere practice in Aikido.

*There are no contests in Aikido.*

*A true warrior is invincible because he contests with nothing.*

*Defeat means to defeat the mind of contention that we harbour within.*

*- Morihei Ueshiba*

武  
産  
合  
氣

**'Takemusu Aiki'**

- Saito Morihiro Sensei

# KYU GRADE SYLLABUS

## 6th kyu

TAIJUTSU mae/ushiro ukemi  
tai sabaki  
tai no henko kihon  
morote dori kokyu ho  
suwari waza kokyu ho

KEN ken kamae; 1st suburi

JO jo kamae; choku tsuki

## 5th kyu

6th kyu plus:

TAIJUTSU tai no henko ki no nagare  
gyaku hanmi katate dori ikkyo omote/ ura waza  
kosa dori kote gaeshi kihon

KEN ken suburi 1-3

JO jo suburi 1-5

## 4th Kyu

6th and 5th kyu plus:

TAIJUTSU gyaku hanmi katate dori nikkyo omote/ ura waza kihon  
gyaku hanmi katate dori shiho nage omote/ ura waza kihon

KEN ken suburi 1-5

JO jo roku no kata



## 3rd kyu

TAIJUTSU	<u>tai no henko kihon/ ki no nagare</u> <u>morote dori kokyu ho</u> <u>suwari waza kokyu ho</u>	
	ikkyo nikkyo sankyo	<u>omote and ura</u> <u>from shomen uchi</u>
	<u>kote gaeshi</u> <u>shiho nage</u> <u>irimi nage</u>	<i>one of each from a freely chosen attack</i>
BUKI DORI	(ken, jo) <i>one of each</i>	<i>(tachi dori examples)</i>
KEN	<u>ken suburi 1-7</u>	
JO	<u>jo suburi 1-10</u>	

## 2nd kyu

TAIJUTSU	<u>tai no henko kihon/ ki no nagare</u> <u>morote dori kokyu ho</u> <u>suwari waza kokyu ho</u>	
	ikkyo nikkyo sankyo yonkyo	<i>tachi waza: <u>omote and ura</u></i> <i><u>from shomen uchi</u></i>
	<u>kote gaeshi</u> <u>shiho nage</u> <u>irimi nage</u> <u>kokyu nage</u>	<i>two of each from freely chosen attacks</i>
BUKI DORI	(ken, jo) <i>two of each</i>	<i>(tachi dori examples)</i>
KEN	<u>ken suburi 1-7</u>	
JO	<u>jo suburi 1-10</u>	



# 1st kyu

TAIJUTSU tai no henko kihon/ ki no nagare  
morote dori kokyu ho  
suwari waza kokyu ho

ikkyo *suwari waza: omote and ura*  
nikkyo *from yokomen uchi*  
sankyo  
yonkyo  
gokyo *(ura waza only)*

kote gaeshi *tachi waza: three of each from*  
shiho nage *freely chosen attacks*  
irimi nage  
kokyu nage  
koshi nage  
ushiro waza

BUKI DORI (ken, jo, tanken) *three techniques for each weapon (tachi dori examples)*

JIYU WAZA against one attacker

KEN ken suburi 1-7  
migi and hidari awase

JO jo suburi 1-20  
choku tsuki as attack at chudan level - two technical responses  
31 jo no kata



# DAN GRADE SYLLABUS

## Shodan

TAIJUTSU	<u>tai no henko kihon/ ki no nagare</u> <u>morote dori kokyu ho</u> <u>suwari waza kokyu ho</u>	
	ikkyo nikkyo sankyo yonkyo gokyo	<i>suwari waza: omote and ura from yokomen uchi</i>  <i>(ura waza only)</i>
	hanmi handachi	<i>three techniques</i>
	<u>kote gaeshi</u> <u>shiho nage</u> <u>irimi nage</u> <u>kokyu nage</u> <u>koshi nage</u> <u>ushiro waza</u>	<i>tachi waza: three of each from freely chosen attacks</i>
BUKI DORI	(ken, jo, tanken)	<i>three techniques for each weapon (<u>tachi dori examples</u>)</i>
JIYU WAZA	<u>against two attackers</u>	
KEN	<u>ken suburi 1-7</u> <u>happo giri</u> migi and hidari awase go no awase / shichi no awase	
JO	<u>jo suburi 1-20</u> happo tsuki <u>choku tsuki: <i>choku tsuki as attack</i> at chudan level (2) and gedan level (2)</u> <i>two technical responses for each level</i> <u>31 jo no kata</u> <u>13 jo no kata</u>	



## Nidan

Minimum time requirement: 1 year of regular practice following shodan attainment.

TAIJUTSU	<u>tai no henko kihon/ ki no nagare</u> <u>morote dori kokyu ho</u> <u>suwari waza kokyu ho</u>	
	ikkyo nikkyo sankyo yonkyo gokyo rokkyo	<i>tachi waza: one of each from a freely chosen attack, omote and ura forms</i>
	hanmi handachi	<i>three techniques</i>
	<u>kote gaeshi</u> <u>shiho nage</u> <u>irimi nage</u> <u>kokyu nage</u> <u>koshi nage</u> <u>ushiro waza</u> <u>kaiten nage</u>	<i>three techniques of each from freely chosen attacks</i>
BUKI DORI	jiyu waza - <i>two attackers</i> (ken and jo)	
JIYU WAZA	<i>against two attackers</i>	
KEN	<u>ken suburi 1-7</u> <u>happo giri</u> migi and hidari awase go no awase / shichi no awase <u>kumi tachi 1-5</u>	
JO	<u>jo suburi 1-20</u> happo tsuki <u>31 jo no kata</u> <u>13 jo no kata</u>	





## Sandan

Minimum time requirement: 2 years of regular practice following nidan attainment.

TAIJUTSU    tai no henko:                    three levels  
                 morote dori kokyu ho:        5 variations  
                 suwari waza kokyu ho:        5 variations

taijutsu jiyu waza:

6-10 techniques at both kihon as well as ki no nagare level (total 12-20 techniques). The objective is to show a clear distinction between kihon and ki no nagare and the transitions between them.

ushiro waza jiyu waza:

6-10 techniques at both kihon as well as ki no nagare level (total 12-20 techniques). The objective is to show a clear distinction between kihon and ki no nagare and the transitions between them.

KEN            Kumitachi: Choose three kumitachi from the 5 and show a progression from basic (1) to flowing (2) to variation (3). 9 sequences in total.

JO             jo mochi nage jiyu waza with three attackers

10 kumijo

13 kata no awase

31 kumijo in steps with connections:

(1-3; 4-6; 9-11; 13-17; 18-22; 22-27; 27-31)



## Yondan

Minimum time requirement: 3 years of regular practice following sandan attainment.

TAIJUTSU free demonstration weaving together elements of the following three areas:

kihon to ki no nagare  
ni nin dori  
henka waza

free demonstration of kaeshi waza

KEN ki musubi no tachi

JO 7 kentai jo  
31 kumijo at fully connected level (ki no nagare)

## Godan

Minimum time requirement: 5 years of regular practice following Yondan attainment.

See above in introduction for greater detail on the below sections for attaining this grade.

1. Technique and Principle
2. Contribution
3. Character
4. Demonstration
5. Interview



## **Rokudan**

Minimum time requirement: 6 years of regular practice following Godan attainment.

See above in introduction for greater detail on the below sections for attaining this grade.

1. Technique and Principle
2. Contribution
3. Character
4. Demonstration
5. Interview

*TAE examination committee, October 2025.*

