

MUSOKAI

Preservation of Muso Shinden Ryu

Member Guidelines for Dojo Etiquette and Ranking at Musokai

DOJO ETIQUETTE:

laido is a Japanese tradition, and newcomers will necessarily acquire a limited vocabulary of counting and moving exercises. Proper ways of carrying, handling and caring for the practice sword (*iaito*) and especially the katana (*shinken*) are also taught and must be adhered to for reasons of both courtesy and safety. During practice, students wear a black *gi* and *hakama*, the traditional, formal garment of the Japanese samurai class.

It is considered a part of dojo etiquette and common courtesy to notify the Chief Instructor and/or Instructor(s) whenever a member will miss a class, and especially if the student will be absent from training for any extended period of time.

Anyone entering the dojo for the purpose of participating in any way, such as training or even just watching training, should conduct themselves with appropriate decorum, such as refraining from unruly behavior or loud conversations. This includes bowing to Shomen (the south wall in the WSA training venue only) upon entering and exiting the building. Furthermore, shoes are to be removed when moving beyond the entrance foyer. Bare feet only are allowed on the training floor, except in rare cases clean cotton tabi may be worn on the practice floor. Respect for the actual training ground is further shown by again bowing to Shomen upon stepping onto and off of the training floor.

Swords, either *iaito*, *bokken*, *shinai* or *shinken*, will always be carried carefully and respectfully. Preferably, carry the sword in the *kamae*-form in the left hand with its heel on the left hip, sword at 45 degrees to the floor, with the *sageo* folded into thirds tucked under the left thumb if the sword is inside a scabbard (*saya*). This *kamae*-form is required when entering or exiting the training floor, and when approaching and leaving your position in the beginning and ending line-up and when moving from one location to another across the training floor. When walking across the training floor, be very aware of others. If passing behind them, watch most carefully for swords wielded especially in a back-swing, and if walking in front of any practitioner whether sitting or standing, slightly bow your upper body forward and extend your right hand to indicate your intent to pass. If you need to leave the training floor during class, remove your sword from your *obi*, bow to it and to Shomen, and set the sword down at the base of a wall or carry it off according to the prescribed manner. If you do not know how this is done please ask a senior student to show you.

At the opening and closing of practice we acknowledge our training room, teacher and sword by bowing respectfully in the prescribed ceremonial sequence. In the event a student arrives after the class has begun, that student may enter unobtrusively, perform the opening ceremony individually, then find a space near the dojo entrance door and quietly join in.

Beginning students sweep the floor before (and usually also after) practice. All students work on mastering the first form (*kata*) before advancing to other forms. Those who successfully complete exams (*shinsa*) demonstrating their ability and experience are awarded degrees of rank.

RANKING:

First and foremost, the overarching philosophy at Musokai is manifested by each member's primary focus on mastering *laido* (Way of the Sword in Drawing, Sheathing and Cutting) while honing the self. Ranking is relegated to secondary focus, useful primarily to indicate when a member has met standards as set forth by the All Japan Kendo Federation (ZNKRF) and regionally

represented by the PNKF/AUSKF. Thus ranking has obvious implications in multi-dojo events such as Regional Seminars, Taikai (Tournament) or Shinsa (Testing), and must therefore conform to consistent standards. Accordingly, Musokai has adopted the following guidelines:

("member" = "Musokai member")

- Iaido, like Kendo, denotes ranks basically on paper only; there are no external indicators such as colored belts.
- All members may participate in ranking examination (shinsa) ONLY with approval of the Chief Instructor, who may consult with the Advisor and any other designated Sensei; their decision will be conveyed to the member by the Chief Instructor simply as a personal invitation to test.
- Recommendations of any members to be considered for ranking shinsa must be submitted to the Chief Instructor by all designated Sensei no less than one month prior to the deadline by which candidates must be registered with any scheduled shinsa events, to allow adequate time for observation and evaluation.
- Any member who participates in a shinsa without invitation from the Chief Instructor may forfeit his/her Musokai membership.
- Eligibility to test, either through training time spent or perceived skills or any apparently adequate combination of both, is meaningless without express invitation from the Chief Instructor.
- An invitation to test extended to any member by the Chief Instructor should be acted upon at the first opportunity.
- Shinsa will consist of a set of prescribed katas as well as a written test.
- Non-ranked members joining Musokai may be considered eligible for their first shinsa upon completion of no less (and quite possibly more) than 12 months of training, depending to some extent on prior experience.
- Ranked members joining Musokai must present the certificate (menjo) of their last examination (shinsa) in order to be recognized.
- Pre-dan rankings (kyu) require periods of training from 6 to 12 months between shinsa; absences will extend this period accordingly.
- Post-dan ranking eligibility (but not necessarily invitation) will be as follows: eligibility for nidan (2nd degree) *at least* one year after shodan (1st degree); eligibility for sandan (3rd degree) at least two years after nidan; eligibility for yondan (4th degree) at least three years after sandan; and so on.
- In all cases the candidate will know what rank they are testing for.
- In the event that any member fails their shinsa they may re-take the examination six months after the failed shinsa with the approval of the Chief Instructor.

Additional conditions may be applied on an individual basis as deemed necessary by the Chief Instructor.