

BEG Handout 1

What is Kendo?

Kendo is the Japanese martial art of fencing. The word Kendo is made of two characters: Ken – Sword and Do – Way or path. Therefore, Kendo means the way of the sword. The All Japan Kendo Federation has described the purpose and reason for practicing kendo as follows:

The Concept of Kendo & the Purpose of Practicing Kendo from the Kendo International Federation

The Concept of Kendo

The concept of Kendo is to discipline the human character through the applied study of the katana or Japanese sword.

The Purpose of Practicing Kendo

To mold the mind and body,
To cultivate a vigorous spirit,
And through correct and rigid training,
To strive for improvement in the art of Kendo,
To hold in esteem human courtesy and honor,
To associate with others with sincerity,
And to forever pursue the cultivation of oneself.
Thus will one be able
To love his country and society,
To contribute to development of culture,
And to promote peace and prosperity among all peoples.

The Dojo

Dojo is literally a place to do the way. Today dojo usually means a place to practice martial arts. Dojo in Japan, have a well defined layout. Central to the dojo is the front or Shomen. In some dojo, there is a small shrine there, in others, a motto or some calligraphy of an inspirational theme to remind people why they are here.

Traditionally the shomen is the wall furthest from the entry door. Some dojos in the U.S., however have not been built with Japanese traditions in mind. If there is a flag or other national symbol on a wall, that wall will be shomen, regardless of the ‘traditional layout’. As you enter the dojo through the door you must bow towards the shomen. This

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bow is giving appreciation to those who came before you to build the dojo both physically and “logically” (students and teachers). Left and right side walls are determined by facing the shomen.

At the opening formalities, the instructors line up with their backs to the right side wall. Students line up with their backs to the left side wall. The line will normally go by ranking or seniority. The highest ranking or most senior members of each group will be towards the Shomen, the lower ranked towards the door. After rank the next determination is age, oldest down to youngest. Rank then age.

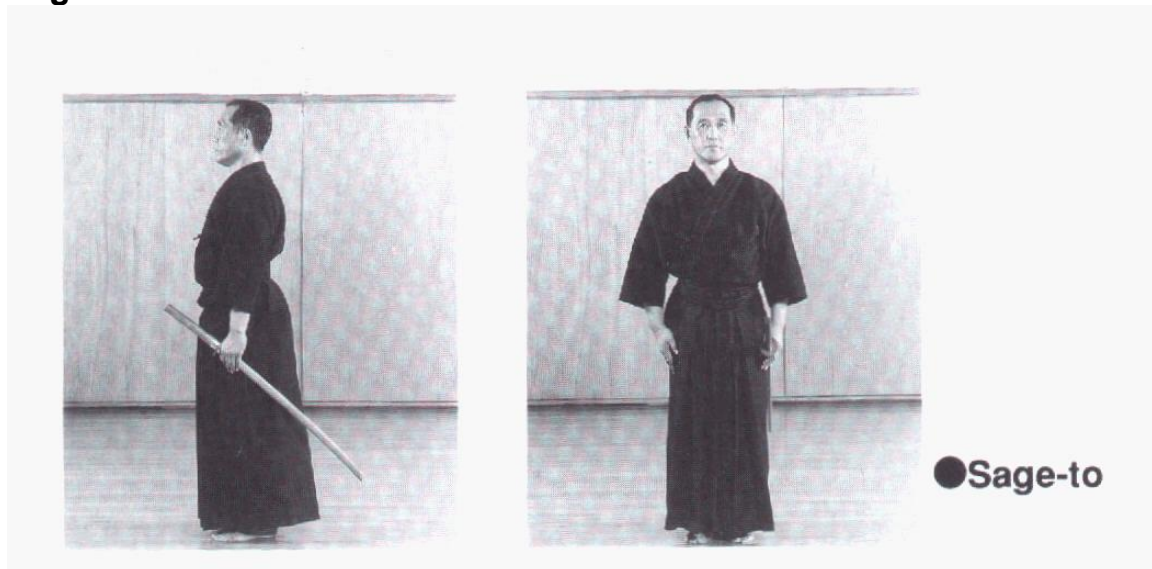
When we do paired practices that involve receiving strikes. The person receiving the first strike (motodachi) will have their back towards the ‘higher wall’, while the person striking will be facing the higher wall. As you enter a new dojo it is very important to establish your knowledge of which wall has the shomen so that you know how to behave in the dojo. The right wall or high side is called the kami no ashi and the left side or low side is called the shimo no ashi.

After practicing, when leaving the dojo, you must face the Shomen, and again bow towards it. Then back out the door.

Various ways to hold the shinai or bokken.

In the pictures below, the instructor is holding a “bokken” or solid wooden sword. Hold the shinai in the same manner however.

Sage-to



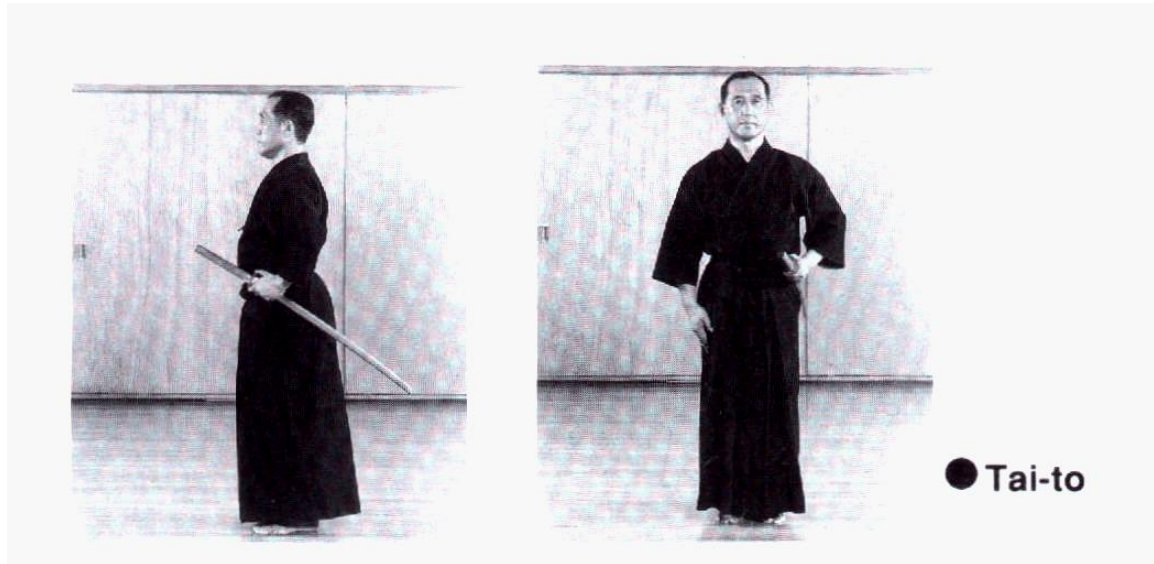
Key points

- Right arm is relaxed straight

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- Sword is held firmly but not tightly in the left hand.
- Sword 'dangles' at about a 45 degree angle.

Tai-to

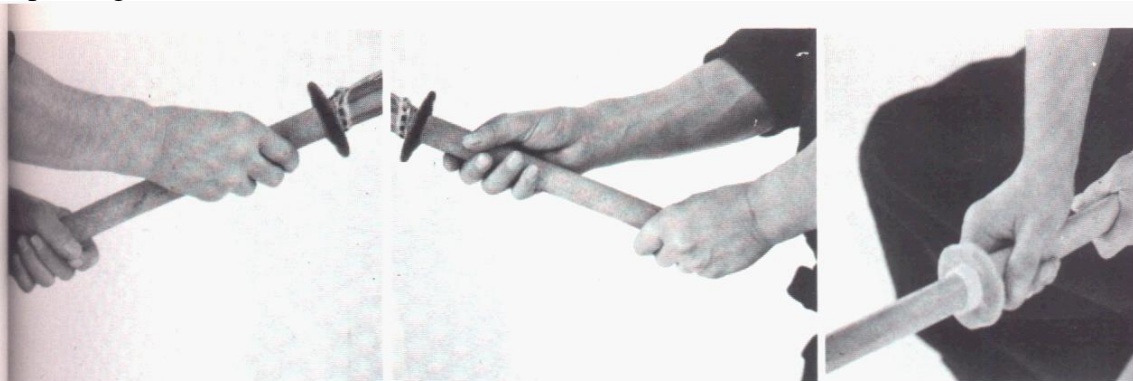


Key points

- Left hand is at the waist.
- Thumb is on the tsuba (guard) of the sword.
- Thumb rests to the inside of the midline of the tsuba
- Sword is at a 45 degree angle.
- Grip is firm but not tight.

Bokken and Shinai Grip

Grip or nigiri.



Way to hold the Shinai.

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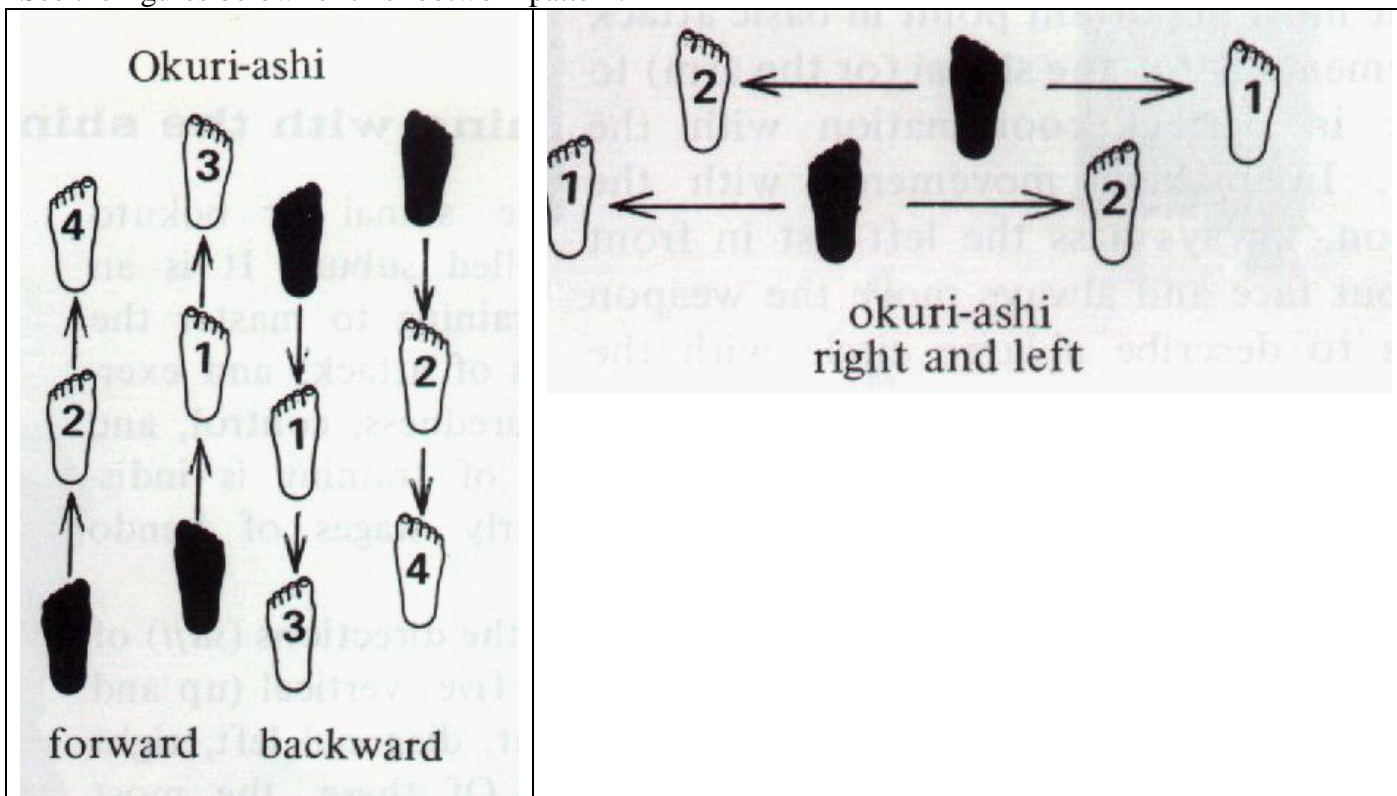
Key points

- The left little and ring fingers are firm, all other fingers are relaxed but grip.
- Left little finger overlaps the bottom edge of the tsuka-gashira
- The left hand is firm the right hand is gentle.
- The fingers are not square to the shinai; the fingers and thumb point downwards and slightly forwards.
- The join between the thumb and fingers of both hands lines up with the tsuru of the shinai.
- Left hand will be about one fist from center of the lower abdomen (tanden).
- The top of the thumb will be a touch below the navel.
- Both hands are held in the body midline.
- The elbows are both rounded and relaxed, the left upper arm in light contact with the bottom rib, the right upper arm naturally a bit away from the body.

Footwork (ashi-sabaki)

Okuri-ashi – the basic kendo footwork

See the figures below for this footwork pattern.



Key points

- Keep the weight on the balls of the feet with the left heel up.

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- Slide, by making slight contact with the floor, don't lift the feet.
- Keep your toes down.. **don't allow your toes to point upwards**, and don't allow the heel of either foot to collapse. **Do not let the left heel touch the floor.**
- After each movement, the feet should return to the initial heel/toe position.
- Move crisply in one action, rather than dividing the step into two parts.
- Move the entire body. **Drive the hips forward by pressure from the ball of the left foot.**
- Going forward (ma-e) and to the right (migi), press with the left foot, rather than reaching out with the right.
- Going backwards (ato) and to the left (hidari), press with the right foot, rather than reaching out with the left.
- As soon as the foot sliding in the direction of motion stops, use it to quickly draw up the trailing foot.
- Keep your abdomen (tanden) strong and firm.

Vocabulary:

Japanese counting

| | | | | |
|----------|------------|-----------|---------|----------|
| 1 – ichi | 2 – ni | 3 – san | 4 – shi | 5 - go |
| 6 - roku | 7 – shichi | 8 – hachi | 9 – kyu | 10 – jyu |

Opening and closing formalities (in order):

| | |
|---------------|--|
| Sereitsu | Line up for formalities |
| Seiza | Sit down, Japanese seated posture on knees rear resting on the heels. |
| Mokuso | Meditation – left hand under right hand, thumbs not quite touching hands at the waist. Eyes unfocussed looking at the ground 6-8 ft. in front of you. Just breath, try not to think. |
| Yame | Stop |
| Shomen-ni Rei | Bow towards the front of the dojo (honoring the dojo and the chance to practice in it). |
| Sensei-ni Rei | Bow towards the instructors, thanking them for their instruction |
| Otagai-ni Rei | Bow to fellow students, thanking them for serving as partners in practice. |
| Ta-te | Stand up. |

Other words and phrases

| | |
|-------------|--------------------------------------|
| Ashi-sabaki | Foot work. |
| Kamae | Stance or attitude |
| Nigiri | Grip (in kendo gripping the shinai). |

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| | |
|---------------|---|
| Okuri-ashi | Footwork where the left foot is held back. |
| Sage-to | Sword held at left side with arm relaxed and straight. |
| Tai-to | Sword held at left side at hip height with thumb on the tsuba |
| Hajime | Begin. |
| Yame | Stop |
| Suburi | Swinging the sword with no physical target. |
| Shomen | Literally the “head” front of the dojo |
| Shimo no ashi | Lower –junior side of the dojo, left side facing shomen |
| Kami no ashi | Higher-senior side of the dojo, right side facing shomen |
| Yasume | Rest-take a break |

Dojo behavior and conduct (Reiho and Saho).

Reiho are the actions that show respect, Saho are the actions that show polite conduct. Both are intended to help the students and instructors focus on practicing kendo in the most effective way possible. Learning a martial art is not like most things you have learned. You will be responsible for learning. You must make your body and mind take on the appropriate movements and attitudes. Instructors can only correct and guide.

Interestingly enough, you can apply this to all your studies. If you do, you will never have a bad instructor, because you will have taken responsibility for your own learning through study, questioning, and seeking the truth. The instructor will have become a secondary component to your learning. This is one of many examples of kendo applying to daily life.

Dojo reiho and saho can be expressed as a set of Dos and Don't:

Do Bow to shomen on entry and exit to the dojo.

Do Bow to your partner before and after each practice with them. Before practice say (as you bow): **Onegai-shimasu**. After practice (as you bow) say: **Domo-arigato-gozaishita**.

Do Walk behind people if possible so that you do not block their view. If you cannot walk behind, extend your right hand and say excuse me softly as you walk in front of them.

Do stand so that people can walk behind you. In that way you help them to be polite to you.

Do move quickly and without hesitation from place to place in the dojo.

Do know what's going on by paying single minded attention to the practice.

Do fold your uniform after each practice, and air it out or wash it before the next.

Do take care of and check your shinai before and after each practice.

Don't Step over or on top of a shinai.

Don't Talk unnecessarily

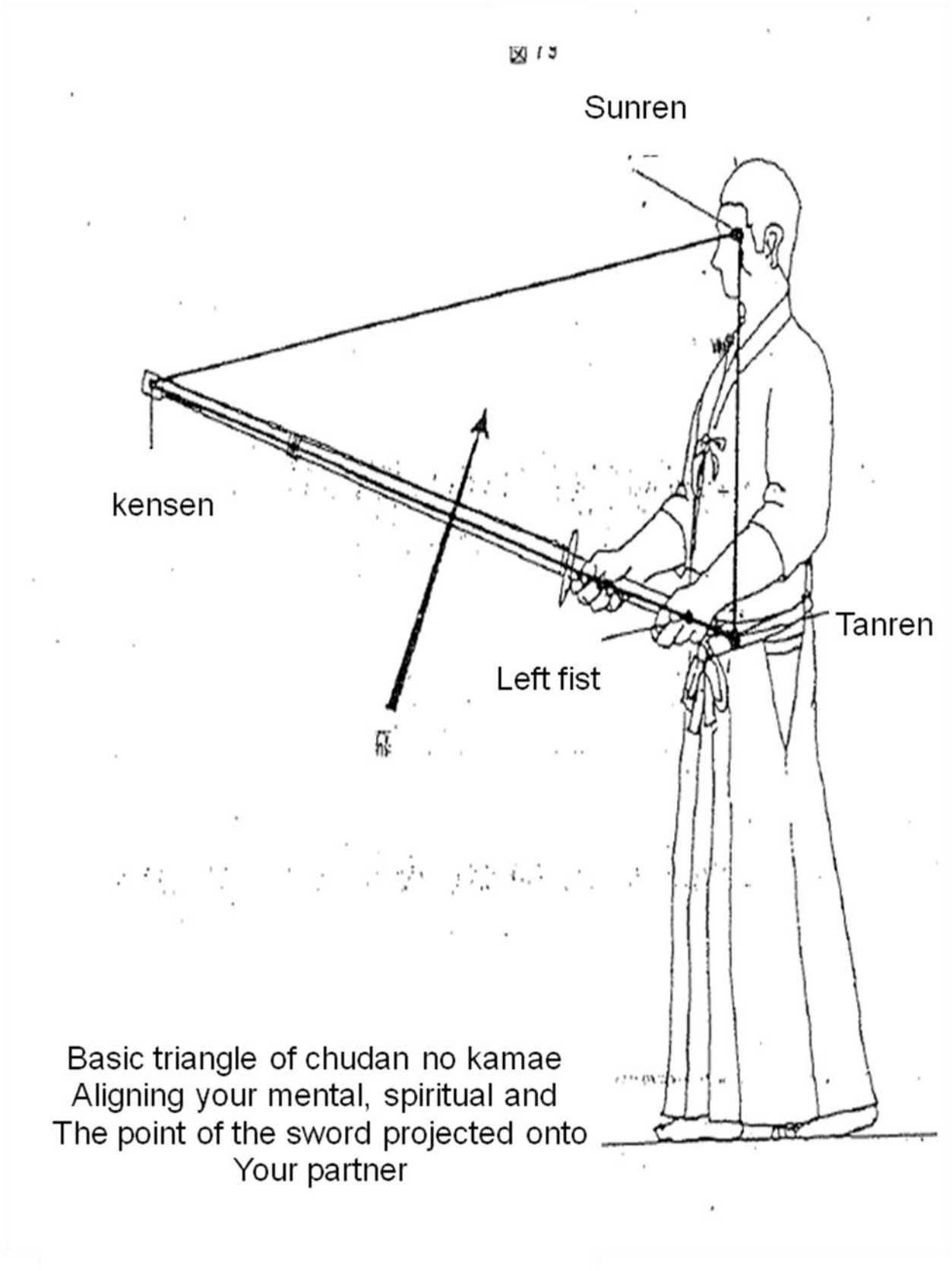
Don't Instruct your partner

Don't Ask questions unless instructors invite it.

Don't Come to practice unprepared.

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Don't Miss any chance to practice.



Triangle of Feet

Vector
of body
when
feet
are
straight

