



## ORIENTATION TO KARATE AT JKA-VT

With its many terms, detailed rules of etiquette, and requirements of physical agility and discipline, Karate for the new student can seem difficult and confusing. It can take a while to feel like all of these elements are harmonized. The goal of this guide is to give you a broad overview and introduction to our practice. It contains a basic introduction to *karate-do* (the way of karate), proper etiquette, ranking system, and terminology.

Our approach to karate-do is to support the development of character, respect for others, and physical ability through training. We foster a spirit of endeavor and discipline, not to defeat others in violence or battle, but to improve ourselves. As they say, “the best won victory is that obtained without shedding of blood.” Sport and competition are thus not our primary focus, although through spirited competition we can develop the calmness, repose, and self-control that characterize the greatest *karatekas* (practitioners of karate).

An empty-handed art of self-defense with ancient roots in many Asian countries, Karate has been developed and refined into many styles. JKA (Japan Karate Association) of VT practices *Shotokan* Karate, whose origins lie in Okinawa. Shotokan was formalized and spread throughout Japan by Gichin Funakoshi during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the 1960s it began to spread around the world. It is the most popular style of Karate in Japan and practiced by more than 10 million people around the world.

JKA-VT is member of the Japan Karate Association World Federation and Shotokan Karate-Do International. We practice under the auspices of JKA U.S. Headquarters in New York City, and have a close “sister dojo” relationship with JKA-Albany and often do co-trainings and testing with them.

### What Happens in Class?

In class, we work on:

*Kihon*: basic techniques of stance, blocking, punching, kicking, etc.

*Kata*: patterned forms

*Kumite*: live-action sparring against an adversary

As your training advances, you will realize that the three are intertwined: training in one practice enhances your refinement in the others.

### Dojo Etiquette

Karate begins and ends with courtesy. In the *dojo* (the place of the way, the location where we practice) it is important to always follow etiquette. The discipline of etiquette is a central element that distinguishes Karate-do from simple sport. Karate is an art form, and following etiquette cultivates mindful awareness of the moment which is required to develop that art. As the Ogasawara-ryu—the 800-year old Samurai rules and practices of etiquette—explains, “the end of all etiquette is to so cultivate your mind that even when you are quietly seated, not the roughest ruffian can dare make



onset onto your person.” The basic rules are as follows:

1. When you are in the *dojo*, your mind should be on Karate and on trying to improve your own technique and develop *kime* (concentrated power). Practice hard, concentrate, and give a spirited *kiai* (shout). Training hard is an important sign of respect for your teacher and the other students.
2. Take your shoes off before you enter the *dojo*. Training is conducted with bare feet.
3. Bow as you enter and leave the *dojo*; this is an expression of courtesy and respect.
4. Bow to the *Sensei* (Teacher) as he enters the *dojo*. Your teacher is addressed as *Sensei* during class. Black belt instructors or assistants to the instructor are addressed as *Sempai* (Senior).
5. Follow the formal opening and closing ceremony. Class generally begins with the command to "line up." Students line up in front of and facing the *Sensei* with more advanced students to the right. Class ends in the same fashion. We address these in more detail below.
6. No talking is allowed during a class. If you understand an instruction, reply with the Japanese word, "*hai*" (means "yes" or "OK") or "*ossu*" ("I understand"). If you have a question or do not understand the instructions or command, raise your hand.
7. During class, no lounging or leaning against walls is permitted. Sit in *seiza* (kneeling position) or cross-legged.
8. Movement, such as yawning, scratching, or looking around is not permitted.  
Students must stand only:
  - a. In an informal attention stance known as "*heisoku-dachi*" — feet together, arms relaxed, hands lightly touching the outside thighs, with eyes focused straight ahead;
  - b. Or, a ready stance known as "*hachiji-dachi*" — feet apart at a shoulder width, hands in a tight fist in front of your hips with eyes focused straight ahead, until you are told to relax or to shake out or stretch your muscles.
9. Do not leave the training area during class without requesting permission to do so. If you need to leave early, let the instructor know in advance.
10. When you're told to move from one part of the room to another, do it quickly (i.e., run or trot, at least). Also, don't pass in front of anyone – go behind and around.
11. Whenever you stand from a sitting position, switch to kneeling, bow, then stand.
12. Every time you get a new partner for any exercise, bow. Every time you're about to switch partners, bow to your old partner before moving on to the next.
13. After completing the introductory classes for new students, all students must wear a traditional white uniform known as a *gi*. When adjusting the *gi*, a student must face the rear of the *dojo*. Please be sure your *gi* is clean and ironed between classes. JKA emblem is allowed on the *gi*.
14. Do not wear jewelry of any kind during class. Headbands are not allowed unless needed. If needed, they should be white only. Protective pads may not be worn except to protect an injury.
15. Always be on time for class. Plan to arrive 15 minutes before the start of class. If you come late because of some unavoidable circumstance, enter the *dojo* with a bow and sit in "*seiza*" (kneel) at the entrance of the practice floor until the instructor gives you permission to join the class. Time is needed to wash the *dojo* floor before training begins.
16. Food and smoking are not allowed in the *dojo*. Towels, articles of clothing, shoes, etc., are not permitted on the *dojo* floor.

Strive to maintain the same respect and etiquette outside the *dojo*, in your everyday life, as you would in the *dojo*. Not only will it reflect well on you and your *dojo*, it will help support your efforts



to develop character.

## Formal Opening and Closing Ceremony

On the command, "line up," students form a line shoulder to shoulder, highest in rank to the right, lowest in rank to the left. Sensei faces the front of the dojo with his back to the class (facing the likeness of Sensei G. Funakoshi). The highest-ranking student gives the command, "seiza," which means assume the formal sitting position. All students kneel and sit back on their heels with their backs straight, knees apart approximately the distance of two fists touching the knee of those students on either side. Students' hands with fingers closed rest on their thighs with their eyes straight ahead. With the command, "mokusō" (clear your mind), students must close their eyes and meditate for a few moments to empty their mind of the day's activities and prepare for learning. The next command, "yame" (stop), signals the students to open their eyes.

The senior student will then command, "*shōmen ni rei*" which means to the front bow and all students bow in unison. Sensei will then turn and face the class. The senior student will command, "*Sensei ni rei*," at which time Sensei and students bow to each other. The class then stands, ready for class to begin.

At the end of class, "line up," "seiza," "mokusō," and "yame" are commanded just as in the beginning of class. The senior student recites the "*dojo kun*" which all students repeat. The *dojo kun* are the five principles that all students strive for—they are based on the traditional Samurai principles of Bushido.

### Dojo Kun (School Principles)

Seek perfection of character  
Be faithful  
Endeavor  
Respect others  
Refrain from violent behavior

The senior student will then command, "*shōmen ni rei*" and "*Sensei ni rei*" as in the beginning of class. All students then say, "Thank you Sensei," at which time the Sensei will rise and leave the practice area. At this point, class is officially over and students stand and leave the *dojo* floor in order of rank.

## Promotions and Ranking

A person begins Karate training by taking special instruction for a period of about one month. During this time, loose clothing such as sweat pants or shorts and t-shirt is the



suggested attire. After learning the basic techniques of stances, blocks, punches, and kicks, the student then joins the regular class. At that time, the student must wear a *gi* (karate uniform) with a white belt. You will be instructed to visit a website where you can purchase your *gi* and belt.

*Kyu* (grade) testing is the method by which a student advances in rank. Depending on your rank, you will generally train anywhere between four to six months between *Kyu* testing. *Dan* or black belt testing is conducted twice a year and the time between tests is longer.

Testing involves demonstrations of basic techniques of *kihon*, *kata*, and *kumite* appropriate to one's rank.

As of 2018, JKA *kyu* rankings are as follows:

KYU	BELT <sup>1</sup>	KATA	TIME BETWEEN TESTS
10-9	White	No <i>kata</i> , only basic <i>kihon</i>	4 months
8	White	<i>Taikyoku shodan</i>	4 months
7	White	<i>Heian shodan</i>	4 months
6	Green	<i>Heian nidan</i>	5 months
5	Green	<i>Heian sandan</i>	5 months
4	Green	<i>Heian yondan</i>	5 months
3	Brown	<i>Heian godan</i>	6 months
2	Brown	<i>Tekki shodan</i>	6 months
1	Brown	Choice: <i>Bassai dai</i> , <i>Kanku Dai</i> , <i>Empi</i> , or <i>Jion</i>	12 months

Black belt rankings are called *Dan*. There are 10 *Dan* rankings.

## Glossary of Basic Terms and Techniques

### English

Natural stance  
 Front stance  
 Back stance  
 Straddle/horse stance

Straight punch  
 Reverse punch  
 Stepping punch  
 Knife hand strike  
 Ridge hand strike

### Japanese

*shizen-tai*  
*zenkutsu-dachi*  
*kokutsu-dachi*  
*kiba-dachi*

*choku-zuki*  
*yaku-zuki*  
*oi-zuki*  
*shuto*  
*haito*

<sup>1</sup> These belt colors are for adults. Children may be awarded colored belts for each *Kyu* accomplished: (white, yellow, orange, green, blue, purple, and brown).



Elbow strike

Front kick  
Front snap kick  
Front thrust kick  
Side kick  
Side snap kick  
Side thrust kick  
Back kick  
Roundhouse kick  
Downward block  
Forearm block  
Knife hand block

High-level (head area)  
Middle level (torso)  
Lower level (below belt)

Ready  
Begin  
Finish  
Kneel  
Meditate  
Bow

Instructor  
Senior  
Junior

One  
Two  
Three  
Four  
Five  
Six  
Seven  
Eight  
Nine  
Ten

*empi-uchi*

*mae-geri*  
*mae-geri-keage*  
*maegeri-kekomi*  
*yoko-geri*  
*yoko-geri-keage*  
*yoko-geri-kekomi*  
*ushiro-geri*  
*mawashi-geri*  
*gedan-barai*  
*ude-uke*  
*shuto-uke*

*joudan*  
*chuudan*  
*gedan*

*yoi*  
*hajime*  
*yame*  
*seiza*  
*mokuso*  
*rei*

*sensei*  
*sempai*  
*kouhai*

*ichi*  
*ni*  
*san*  
*shi*  
*go*  
*roku*  
*shichi*  
*hachi*  
*ku*  
*ju*