

North American Beikoku Shido-Kan Karate-do Association

Guidelines for Evaluating Dan Degree Candidates

I. Introduction.

The following Guidelines for Evaluating Dan Degree Candidates (“Guidelines”) are intended to provide a framework for assessing whether a student has met the necessary criteria to progress to certain advanced ranks within the North American Beikoku Shido-Kan Karate-do Association (“Association”). They are also intended to promote consistency within the Association among the holders of various Dan degrees.

The Guidelines were written based on conversations with Iha Sensei regarding his expectations of students who are recommended for promotion. Of course, portraying these expectations on paper is no small task. First, the written word is an insufficient tool to capture the criteria for advancing in rank in large part because there is no set science for determining whether a student should be promoted. Second, although Iha Sensei’s karate is natural, beautiful and seemingly simple, at the same time it can be overwhelmingly detailed and complex. It requires students to see the movement, repeat the movement, and study and revisit the movement over the course of a lifetime until it feels and appears pure. It cannot be learned from a book or by listening to a lecture. These factors make it difficult convey in writing how to evaluate someone who studies it. Nevertheless, despite these challenges, Iha Sensei has seen fit to adopt these Guidelines in an effort to set broad standards for assessing Dan degree candidates.

The Guidelines are organized into several sections. Section I includes these introductory remarks for informational purposes. Section II sets forth a critical element for progression that Iha Sensei believes to be important for all ranks. Finally, Section III attempts to describe Iha Sensei’s criteria for advancing from Sho-dan (1st Dan) through Nana-dan (7th Dan).

II. Character.

Iha Sensei has often noted that a hallmark of a good student is excellent character. Specifically, he has stated that a good student is first and foremost a “good person.” Therefore, a crucial factor in determining whether a student is ready to advance in rank is a student’s attitude in the dojo and the role he or she takes in maintaining the dojo.

On the subject of a student’s attitude in the dojo, a good student will foster strong friendships and be a person who others enjoy training with. For example, such a student does not seek to “win” during partnership training, but instead strives to help his or her peers improve. The student accomplishes this through respect for others and humility in working with others.

On the subject of maintaining the dojo, a good student will volunteer to assist the seniors with the demands of operating the dojo. For example, if possible and when appropriate, a good student will help maintain the dojo, teach during class, and support the seniors with taking care of Iha Sensei and/or the student’s direct instructor. Additionally, if possible and when appropriate, a good student will help plan, execute and regularly attend dojo events.

III. Testing Criteria.

- A. *Sho-dan (1st Dan)*. To meet the minimum threshold for promotion to 1st Dan, a student must know Kihon Kata 1 through Chinto, all of the Charts, all of the Kumites, all of the Bunkai, and all of the Oyo-bunkai. Iha Sensei has stressed that “knowing” is very important at this stage, and that a student’s “eyes” will reveal whether he or she “knows the motion.” In other words, a student testing for 1st Dan must exhibit “confidence” in his or her technique under the pressure of a formal examination of the student’s progress. However, “knowing” is different than “mastering.” Iha Sensei has stated that 1st Dan is only the “beginning”, and “they are ready to take the next step”.

In assessing whether a student is ready to progress to 1st Dan, the Committee must rely in part on the student’s direct instructor’s judgment. Therefore, it is incumbent upon a student’s direct instructor to ensure that the student’s abilities have grown to a 1st Dan level. In other words, it is the teacher’s responsibility to make sure that a student is ready to test. Of course, the student must devote sufficient time, effort, and study to successfully pass a 1st Dan examination, but the student’s teacher is primarily accountable for preparing the student accordingly.

- B. *Ni-dan (2nd Dan)*. To meet the minimum threshold for promotion to 2nd Dan, a student must know the material listed above. The student will continue to learn Gojushiho. He or she will demonstrate recognizable improvement from when he or she tested for 1st Dan. In addition, the student must also complete 2 years of continuous training beginning from his or her promotion to 1st Dan. Sensei Iha has noted that a year of classes should be a minimum of 100 classes.

Iha Sensei has noted that 2nd Dan holders have committed to making karate-do an important part of their lives. Iha Sensei has also noted that 2nd Dan holders focus on being the best they can be, rather than comparing themselves to others. At the dan rank, the emphasis is on quality versus the quantity introduced at the kyu level.

In assessing whether a student is ready to progress to 2nd Dan, the Committee must rely in part on the student’s direct instructor’s judgment. Therefore, it is incumbent upon a student’s direct instructor to ensure that the student’s abilities have grown to a 2nd Dan level. Of course, the student must devote sufficient time, effort, and study to successfully pass a 2nd Dan examination, but the student’s teacher is primarily accountable for preparing the student accordingly.

Although the judgment of a student’s direct instructor is crucial, the Committee is ultimately responsible for determining whether a student is qualified for 2nd Dan. In making this determination, Iha Sensei has stated that no single factor is most important. Rather, the student must showcase significant improvement in all areas to merit consideration for advancement.

C. *San-dan (3rd Dan)*. To meet the minimum threshold for promotion to 3rd Dan, a student demonstrate recognizable improvement from when he or she tested for 2nd Dan. In addition, the student must also complete 3 years of continuous training beginning from his or her promotion to 2nd Dan. The principles previously set forth for determining whether a student is qualified for 2nd Dan also apply in evaluating whether a student is qualified for 3rd Dan, as well as all other ranks. Sensei Iha commented, “we must always make our karate better, step by step”.

D. *Yon-dan (4th Dan)*. To meet the minimum threshold for promotion to 4th Dan, a student must showcase a significant progression in overall ability from when he or she tested for 3rd Dan. The “significant progression in overall ability” required for 4th Dan differs from the “recognizable improvement” required for 2nd Dan and 3rd Dan in the respect that a significant progression in overall ability is more substantial. In addition, the student must also complete 4 years of continuous training beginning from his or her promotion to 3rd Dan.

Iha Sensei has stated that 4th Dan holders must exhibit excellent body control and demonstrate a strong understanding of the details of each technique. For example, 4th Dan holders must be able to: (1) perform full, fluid motions using the entire body; (2) effectively and efficiently deliver high levels of power by avoiding “over-motion” and moving in a relaxed manner; and (3) lack ego in training with others. Although Iha Sensei has stated that 4th Dan holders must concentrate on making themselves better, he also stated that 4th Dan holders must be committed to helping others as well. At this level, Sensei Iha wants to see a person “organize their power”.

E. *Go-dan (5th Dan) / Renshi*. As a Renshi, a 5th Dan holder is treated as “a person who has mastered oneself” and is fully capable of opening a branch dojo. With that in mind, Iha Sensei has noted that 5th Dan holders have advanced to a point in their training where they have “basics to teach” and can confidently say “I did Karate.” Consequently, self-perfection is critical for 5th Dan, as well as mastering the fundamentals of Iha Sensei’s teachings to pass on to others. To qualify for 5th Dan, a 4th Dan holder must complete 5 years of continuous training beginning from his or her promotion to 4th Dan.

F. *Roku-dan (6th Dan) / Shihan*. As a Shihan, a 6th Dan holder is recognized as having the ability to oversee an area of dojos and is trusted to be able to maintain quality not only by example of his or her own school, but by those dojos his or her students may establish. Nevertheless, although Iha Sensei recognizes Shihan holders as “certified instructors,” these individuals are still training to perfect their instructing ability. With that said, a candidate for 6th Dan is not only judged by his or her skill as an individual, but also the skill and character of their students or those within the dojo they mentor. To qualify for 6th Dan, a 5th Dan holder must complete 6 years of continuous training beginning from his or her

promotion to 5th Dan. The 5th Dan holder must also have reached age 35. Age and time requirements can be adjusted on an individual basis at the discretion of the President of the North American Beikoku Shido-kan Karate-do Association.

- G. *Nana-dan (7th Dan) / Kyoshi*. As a Kyoshi, a 7th Dan holder is recognized as earning the respect of the Association's membership and the respect of the 7th Dan's direct instructor. Every motion in and out of the dojo needs be a good example to others. Utmost character is essential. With this status, it is understood that a Kyoshi is capable of representing Iha Sensei anywhere the Kyoshi travels. Accordingly, Iha Sensei has noted that 7th Dan holders are senior Association members and instructors who serve as good examples to others. Therefore, a 7th Dan holder's teaching ability is of utmost importance.

The 6th Dan holder must also have reached age 40. Age requirements can be adjusted on an individual basis at the discretion of the President of the North American Beikoku Shido-kan Karate-do Association. The promotion to 7th Dan is based upon the recommendation of the President of the North American Beikoku Shido-kan Karate-do Association.

- H. *Hachi-dan (8th dan) / Kyoshi*. As a Kyoshi, a 8th Dan holder is recognized as earning the respect of the Association's membership and the respect of the 8th Dan's direct instructor. Every motion in and out of the dojo needs be a good example to others. Utmost character is essential. With this status, it is understood that a Kyoshi is capable of representing Iha Sensei anywhere the Kyoshi travels. Accordingly, Iha Sensei has noted that 8th Dan holders are senior Association members and instructors who serve as good examples to others. Therefore, a 8th Dan holder's teaching ability is of utmost importance.

The 7th Dan holder must also have reached age 50. Age requirements can be adjusted on an individual basis at the discretion of the President of the North American Beikoku Shido-kan Karate-do Association. The promotion to 8th Dan is based upon the recommendation of the President of the North American Beikoku Shido-kan Karate-do Association.

- I. *Kuu-dan (9th dan) / Hanshi*. Entrusted to the President of the Association, Seikichi Iha, Hanshi, Jyu-dan.
- J. *Juu-dan (10th dan) / Hanshi*. Grand Master. Entrusted to the President of the Association, Seikichi Iha, Hanshi, Jyu-dan.