

## **BLACK BELT GRADING - GUIDANCE**

In order to prepare a student for a first dan black belt grading, it is essential that the student understands the attributes expected of him/her as a black belt - not all of these will be tested on the day; they will be demonstrated through many hours of training and development. A black belt grading is a significant undertaking; but it's not the end of the road, it's just the beginning.

Black belt success implies a level of attainment, not just in physical or technical terms, but in maturity as a martial artist; demonstration of skill and acceptance of the principles and philosophy of a martial art. With the black belt comes responsibility, to martial arts, to yourself and to fellow martial artists.

The principles and the key attributes (not exhaustive) of a black belt are briefly explored below:

- Take the responsibility seriously - Seriousness, passion, drive, commitment and consideration.
- Be committed to the excellence and quality of fellow students. Encourage improvement; we never stop learning.
- Be Patient. With yourself and others.
- Be a good role model. In all situations.
- Be Confident. A combination of personal and professional confidence that creates respect for a black belt amongst other students and fellow black belts alike. In order for students to respect and have confidence in a black belt, the black belt must first have confidence in him or herself and in what is being taught
- Motivate. Motivate and energise fellow students and instructors. The best way to motivate is for the black belt/instructor to be motivated first. Motivation is sparked by interest and setting goals, and is fuelled by achievement.
- Demonstrate great skill. Practice, master techniques and always strive to improve.
- Challenge yourself and fellow students and guide them to their goals. We all need to be constantly challenged. Without challenge there is no improvement, and without improvement there is no success.
- Communicate. Be clear and consistent.
- Be a good counsellor and guide. Accept that very often fellow martial artists need extra help in the form of advice or encouragement. Because black belts are role models, students will feel the need to confide in them. Black belts need to be willing to listen and mentally prepared to hear anything that students have to say.
- Be enthusiastic and energetic.
- Show humility and mutual respect.
- Be controlled and self disciplined.
- Possess the required knowledge.

More specifically, the list below presents just a few of the student's attributes that the grading panel will look for before and during the grading. Some are easy to spot and assess, others are less tangible, and are more about character and personality:

- Syllabus
- Fitness
- Technique
- Determination
- Spirit
- Desire/hunger
- Focus
- Respect

- Empathy
- Consideration
- Effort
- Support
- Conduct/etiquette

Whilst the syllabus provides the framework for any grading, the dan grading expects more than just satisfying basic syllabus requirements. It should be the culmination of practice, repetition and training, but more than anything it is about the development of you as an individual and as a martial artist; and acceptance of the responsibility this entails. Success prepares you for the next stage of development.

You must 'turn up' and be prepared - sounds obvious I know - but in all respects you must be ready. This requires preparation over and above your training; food, drink, weapons, uniform, spare kit, notes. Take some time to think about this.

Be focussed, listen to instructions and respond promptly. Do your best, and don't look for an easy way out. We all know it hurts, but you must dig deep - expect to be surprised at what you can achieve on the day. If you aren't then you probably haven't tried hard enough!

Everything you do during a grading will be observed by a member of the panel. Remember, they all want you to pass, but don't be complacent - you are a measure of their effort, judgement and success. You will be encouraged and motivated throughout, listen to this advice; it is meant for you.

Dealing with pressure - you must have the strength of character to deal with pressure. Dan gradings will test you both physically and mentally; we all know that the two are closely linked. The panel have all been there before; they have struggled and suffered just like you; we all deal with the pressure in different ways - learn to handle it - stay focussed and see it through. Don't let it derail you, don't give up, remember why you are there.

Don't go through the motions - every technique, from the very first you execute to the very last, some 5 to 6 hours later, should be completed like you mean it. Your performance will drop off as you fatigue but this shouldn't stop you from trying. You will be amazed at what you can achieve.

When you are called up to demonstrate a technique, or speak to the panel, don't walk, jog, be enthusiastic, show respect, bow and be ready for anything.

Never drop your guard - if in doubt get your guard up and get on your toes. When you get up from the floor, don't use your hands, even when you are tired. Make this a habit - do this in training, from the moment you bow in until the moment you bow out - encourage others to do the same. Be an example to others.

Look out for your fellow students - at some point every student, no matter how experienced will need some support - encourage, respect and support each other.

Remember your instructor thinks you are ready - do your best and repay their support and confidence.