

Dojo Etiquette

Standing bow

Stand with heels together, feet pointing slightly outward (like a "V"). Keep knees straight; elbows straight and relaxed; hands open and at the seams of your pants (the outside of your legs); fingers together. Bend at the waist, about 20 degrees forward. Unbend. The whole bow takes about a breath's length.

Kneeling (seiza)

Place left knee on the floor; then right knee. Sit down on feet. Big toes of left and right feet should overlap (either one on top). Keep back straight and shoulders relaxed. Rest left hand (hand open, fingers together) on left thigh and right hand on right thigh, so that fingers point inward. For anatomical reasons, men should have about a fist or two's width between their knees, women should have knees together.

Bowing in seiza

Slide the left hand from the thigh to the floor immediately in front of the left knee (not too far in front, i.e., left elbow shouldn't touch the floor). Do the same with the right hand, so that the right hand motion is slightly behind (in time) the left hand motion. Palms should touch the floor to show deep respect. Bow at the waist, taking a little longer than for a standing bow (forehead comes close to the floor, but does not touch it). Slide your hands back up to their initial position on the thighs, this time with the left hand slightly behind the right hand.

Entering and exiting the dojo

Bow, standing at the entrance, facing the dojo or towards the front of the dojo, whether you are entering or exiting the dojo.

Lateness

Try not to be late. If you are late, bow in, then quietly kneel near the entrance. Wait until the instructor acknowledges you. Then bow kneeling, get up, and quickly join the group. If you arrive just as everyone is kneeling at the beginning, don't move, don't make any noise, just wait until warming-up starts, and bow in as described above.

Opening sequence

When you hear "Line up!" or "One line!", stand shoulder to shoulder facing the front of the dojo, in rank order. Try to line up so that the instructor is right in the middle of the line. If class size is big, the senior student may ask you to form more than one line, in which case, you should try to line up so that the lines are approximately of the same length. "Seiza!": sit down in seiza, so that knees are aligned with the person on your left. "Mokusou!": quiet meditation – just lower your gaze, relax, and breathe. "Mokusou yame!": stop. "Shoumen ni rei!": Bow to the front of the room (this signifies bowing to the institution of karate and to the line of instructors who brought it to your instructor). "Sensei ni rei!": Bow to the instructor. When you're bowing, you can say "onegaishimasu," which, roughly translated, means "Please," i.e., please teach me, please help me, please hold class, etc. At the signal of the instructor, get up (quickly, without waiting for the person on your left, necessarily).

Closing sequence

Same as the opening sequence, except that after mokusoh, there is a recitation of the **dojo kun**. Repeat after the senior student, loudly (but not so loud that your voice stands out) and in unison. During the final bow to the instructor, you can say "arigatou gozaimashita," which means "Thank you." "Thank you" in English is okay, too. At the end, the instructor will get up. Wait until the person on your left bows and gets up before you do the same.

Clean-up

Before class starts, there is usually some sort of cleaning of the dojo. During this time, actively participate to whatever extent you can. Don't sit back and stretch when others are still cleaning.

General Etiquette Guidelines During Training

- Most importantly, the moment class starts, your mind should be on karate and on trying to improve your own technique. Concentrate, give spirited kiai, don't talk unnecessarily, and practice hard! (This is under "etiquette" because doing otherwise would be disrespectful to the instructor, as well as to yourself, both of who have bothered to come.)
- Don't wear jewelry, watches, etc. Don't chew gum.
- Whenever 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.
- Whenever you're asked to stand back or sit back and watch, do so in a normal standing or kneeling position, silently, without leaning on walls or distracting others. If you're ever in a kneeling position and you're uncomfortable, it's generally okay to bow and then switch to sitting cross-legged.
- Whenever you stand from a sitting position, switch to kneeling, bow, then stand.
- If you ever need to leave a class early, let the instructor know beforehand.
- 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.
- Don't make overt displays of how tired you are, no matter how tired you are.
- If you're ever asked to count, count in whatever language you feel comfortable with, but make the counts short, sharp, and spirited.
- Follow normal rules of etiquette that apply.
- Finally, these aren't strict rules followed by every dojo. Some don't follow them exactly, in which case, you should start off erring on the side of being overly courteous but avoid doing anything to stand out, since that in itself can be interpreted as rudeness.

Other things you should know

- Don't say any words when you kiai. "Kiai" itself, being a Japanese word should NOT be a kiai. Common kiai include "Ya!" and "Ei!"
- Don't be afraid to kiai! If you have a strong kiai, it will often spur others to work harder, as well. The overall tone of a class is set by the level of spirit of the class, which can be raised with better kiai. On the other hand, if your spirit is poor or your kiai weak, you might bring down the class spirit.
- Do not hesitate to ask senior students and instructors for help before or after class. Time permitting, you should try to learn kata outside of class so that during class, the instructor can spend more time making comments about your technique rather than what move comes next.