



Beginning Kendo

Vocabulary

Here is a list of basic kendo terms.

A. **Japanese Pronunciation**

When written using English letters, Japanese follows some basic rules of pronunciation:

- A is pronounced as “ah”
- I is pronounced as “ee”
- E is pronounced as “eh”
- O is the long “o” sound, as in “go”
- U is pronounced as “oo”
- when an I or U come at the end of a word, they are often almost silent, depending on the speaker. Thus, “ichi” will often sound like “eech” and “desu” will sound like “des”
- there is no distinction between R and L in Japanese. The same character is used for both. For example, even though the word for 6 is roku, with an R, it is pronounced “loku”.

B. **Counting**

- Ichi – 1
- Ni – 2
- San – 3
- Shi – 4
- Go – 5
- Roku – 6
- Shichi – 7
- Hachi – 8
- Kyu – 9
- Ju – 10
- Ni-ju – 20
- San-ju – 30
- Yon-ju (or Shi-ju) – 40
- Kai – number of times. So, if the dojo master says “ju kai,” it means do the exercise ten times. You will often hear “san ju kai” because we do some of the exercises 30 times.

C. Directional Words

- Mae – forward
- Ahto – back
- Migi – right
- Hidari – left
- Zenshin – moving forward
- Koutai – moving backward
- Sayu – left/right (alternating between migi and hidari)

D. Other Kendo Vocabulary and Concepts

- Arigato gozaimashita – “thank you,” past tense. When bowing to a sensei (teacher), you should add “Domo” at the beginning: domo arigato gozaimashita. Present tense: arigato gozaimasu.
- Hajime – begin
- Yame – end
- Yasume – rest position with shinai low and to the right
- Hantai – opposite; do the opposite now

- Mo ichi do – one more time
- Mo itt kai – one more time
- Shoshinsha - beginner
- Maai – the distance or space between two individual fencers
- Shiai – a match between fencers
- Kikentai ichi – spirit, sword, and body are one

Now that you are familiar with some basic vocabulary, we can look at the stretching and warmup exercises we do at the beginning of every class.

E. Stretching Warmup – at very beginning of class

- When class is called to begin, all shinai are placed in a wheel formation on the floor in the middle of the dojo
- Then dojo members spread out in a circle for stretching exercises.
- You can just copy what the rest of the class is doing for stretching exercises so there is no need to review the Japanese terms. But, when you begin the next part of class, you are in the front line, so it is helpful to memorize the exercises.

F. Suburi Warmup Exercises with the Shinai

- Line up, kids and beginners are in the front line(s)
- Kamae-te – take the basic stance with sword at medium guard position
- Perform one sonkyo
- Okuri ashi - Moving backward, forward, side to side, without swinging shinai.
 - Two steps forward, two back, two right, then two left.

- Mae mae, ahto ahto, migi
mighi, hidari hidari
- Jougeh-suburi - Moving backward and forward, swinging shinai – two forward, two backward. The shinai movement in this exercise is to stretch for maximum long range, meaning you swing further backward when raising the shinai and swing down almost to the floor when swinging downward with the shinai.
- Side to side (sayu) suburi, alternating which foot is forward. When swinging to the left, right foot is forward, and vice versa. The rear foot moves into a line directly behind the other foot. Like the Jougeh suburi exercise, the swing is extra big to stretch.
- Ippon uchi (single strike)

- Hit the men following a call “Men wo ute.”. Repeat 2-3 times.
- Hit the kote following a call “Kote wo ute.” Repeat 2-3 times.
- Hit the do following a call “Do wo ute.” Repeat 2-3 times.
- Hit the tsuki with fumikomi following a call “Nodo wo tsuke.” Repeat 2-3 times.
- Renzoku waza (multiple strikes)
 - Hit the kote-men following a call “Kote-men wo ute.” Two steps forward, striking the kote and the men each time. Then taking two step back, and counting “ichi, ni” but not striking.
 - Following a call “Renzoku men wo ute.”, hit the three-

consecutive men strikes
forward, and then three-
consecutive men strikes
moving backward.

- Following a call “Renzoku sayu men wo ute”, hit the three-consecutive mens similarly, but alternating right, left, right forward, and then left, right, left backward,.
- Matawari suburi- Sonkyo men strikes - feet shoulder width apart, keeping back straight. This is done 30 times with counting.
- Hayasuburi – rapid forward and backward movement with a sword strike on the forward movement. Performed 30 times with counting, followed by a fumikomi men forward, then turn around and execute another fumikomi-men to move back to starting position

- Shinkokyu (Deep breathing)- One step forward, shinai up high with inhaling a deep breath, slowly down into sonkyo with exhaling. Stand up, raise shinai up high with inhaling, step back with exhaling. Execute fully twice. On the third step forward and sonkyo, put shinai away, stand, and step back.
- Bow, and go to the end of the gym for **line exercises**.
- Following a call “Suri ahi (or okuri ahi) hajime.”, fast okuri ashi across the gym and back, no uchi, but sword in chodan no kamae
- Following a call “Fumikomi men hajime.”, alternating long fumikomi men strikes, into deep fumikomi so that your forward knee is bent and you are fully extended, but keep your back straight (alternating right and left foot forward)

- Following a call “Men uchi san kai hajime.”, big men strike with fumikomi, then suriashi step forward; repeating three times across the dojo
- Following a call “Kote-men uchi san kai hajime.”, do the same thing, but two fumimoki, kote then men, then move forward. Three times across the floor
- “Renzoku men hajime.”, do repeated men strikes with fumikomi all the way across the gym.
- “Renzoku kote-men hajime.” Same repeated strikes with fumikomi, alternating between kote and men all the way across the gym.
- Form two lines. Practice okuri ashi listening for the dojomaster’s commands. See section C.
- Sonkyo, put shinai away. Back up. Bow.

- Form two lines, kneeling

G. Commands Used at the Beginning of Class – After warmups

- Serietsu – line up
- Seiza – to sit in seiza position with knees together and shinai to the left
- Mokuso – meditate
- Rei – bow
 - Shomen ni rei – bow to kamiza (banner) or joseki (higher ranking members)
 - Sensei gata ni rei – bow to the sensei
 - Jouseki ni rei – bow to “higher ranking seat or spot” (only when Tagawa sensei is absent)
 - Otagai ni rei – bow to classmates
- Kiotsuke/Sageto – come to attention position

H. Basic Stances and Movements

- Gedan no kamae – low guard position
- Chudan no kamae – medium guard position
- Jodan no kamae – high guard position
- Chudan no kamae – basic stance
- Sonkyo – squat with sword in ready position
- Taito – place the left thumb on the tsuba and bring shinai up, getting ready to draw
- Nuki toh – draw the shinai
- Osame toh – sonkyo, then put the sword away
- Jougeh – up/down
- Jougeh – suburi – one step forward and one step back, swinging the shinai to maximum extension each time.
- Zenshin – moving forward
- Koutai – moving back

- Ashi – moving with your legs; no shinai movement
- Uchi – to strike with the shinai
- Men Uchi - Same as zenshin koutai okuri ashi, but striking men with the shinai with each step
- Kirikaeshi – exercise involving two fencers, one striking and one receiving.
- Suriashi (or okuriashi) – basic footwork where the feet are moved in each direction (see section C) from the basic foot position. Quiet steps sliding your feet without slapping the floor.
- Fumikomi – a basic footstep, pushing your body using the whole left leg, and landing on the floor with the right foot, often with a slapping sound. This footstep is used when you strike “uchi” with a shinai, but

usually not with suburi for which suriashi (or okuriashi) is used. .

- Suburi – Exercise with the shinai, using basic cuts
- Hayasuburi/chioyaku-suburi – fast exercise, moving forward and backward quickly, striking with the shinai when moving forward and raising the shinai when moving backward

I. Parts of the Shinai

- Ken-sen – the very tip of the shinai
- Sakigawa – leather covering on pointy end of the shinai
- Naka-yui – leather string around the shinai and located near the sakigawa
- Tsuka – hilt; handle
- Tsuka gashira – butt end of the shinai

- Tsuru – the string leading from the sakigawa to the tsuka. This represents the dull edge of the sword
- Monouchi – striking point of the shinai; around nakayui.
- Jinbu – the entire blade area of the shinai; from tsuba to kensen
- Tsuba – handguard; plastic ring that goes on the tsuka
- Tsuba dome – rubber stopper that holds the tsuba in place