

GKR KARATE JOURNEY

KUMITE TIPS

1. Continue With What You Know

The kumite journey is about constantly improving what you already know, thereby developing instinctive ability, and adding to this with new techniques, strategies and principles.

» By now you have been sparring for a few months and you're beginning to get a feel for movement, distance and of course timing. Sparring is the one part of the karate journey where you're not just focusing on what you're doing, but needing to be focused and aware of what your partner is doing. Sticking to the basic fundamentals of sparring is a key element to continuing with what you know.

» You will start to develop more skill, speed, combinations and reflex. You will start to gain more confidence in your own ability and in your partners control level. This is an exciting time for students as it gives you the ability to start putting basics and principles into practice in a safe and encouraging environment.

2. Opening The Front Hand

When lower grades open their hands during kumite they become prone to injuring their fingers. This is because they have yet to refine their blocking skills. There are advantages to having open hands during kumite however. They keep you relaxed and allow you to develop your hikite. Hikite is the process where a karate-ka brings their returning hand back to the hip during a punch. The idea of hikite is that the returning hand does not come back empty. In essence, as opposed to simply blocking a technique, we block and simultaneously seize the technique. There are many other uses for hikite, be sure to visit the Articles section of our website and go to the Training Articles category. You can read an article detailing 7 uses of Hikite.

» While it's not suggested that you start to develop your hikite at Orange belt, you may start to develop your confidence and ability with defending with the front hand open.

3. The Rear Hand To Remain Closed

It's heavily suggested that Orange belt's keep their rear hand closed at all times. This ensures that your fist and wrist are always shaped correctly for punching, reducing the risk of injuring in case you strike an opponents forearm or elbow during kumite.

Orange Belt (7th Kyu)



4. Technique And Principles Over Speed And Competition

During partner sparring, kime and speed should not be your priorities. Nor should being overly competitive. Being the best in your dojo may not necessarily transcend to being well-equipped for self-defense. It's far more important that you develop your techniques and habits because developing sound instincts is far more important for preparing you for self-defense. Furthermore, your instructor is assessing your technique, not whether or not you experience victory or defeat.

5. Stances

The ability to flow between stances should begin to show up at Orange belt. An example of this is:

- a) Starting in a sound fighting stance (one that offers a balance between solidity and mobility), then transferring the weight forward to strike (landing in a stance similar to long-forward stance (eg, two shoulder widths long, the front knee well bent with the knee directly over

the front foot etc). Then immediately after landing the strike, shifting the weight back again to a strong, stable stance (resembling a stance like Sumo or Back Leaning stances).

- b) Kicking from a sound fighting stance and landing in a sound fighting stance immediately afterwards.

Gichen Funakoshi (the father of modern karate) had 20 precepts for a karate-ka to follow. Of these, number 17 was, "Kamae wa shoshinsha ni ato wa shizentai." This roughly translates to, "Formal stances are for beginners, advanced students use natural postures."

» He did imply that advanced students neglect their stances. He implied that the longer we train in formal stances; they start to become ingrained into our subconscious and become natural. So when fighting, while we may not have our back leg perfectly straight (like the formal Long Forward stance) the principles of Long Forward stance are still present - in a more natural posture (2 shoulder widths long, front knee well bent etc).

6. Develop Your Offensive Zanshin - Your Continued State Of Awareness

Now you have reached Orange belt, it's vital that you start to hone your zanshin. Zanshin is a continued state of awareness. During kumite many students lose their zanshin after executing their own attack/s. They do this by:

- a) Dropping their hands after striking. The hands must always come back to guard after an attack/s is finished. You cannot assume your strike will achieve Ikken Hisatsu (one strike finish). You must be prepared in case your technique is blocked and a counter strike comes your way.
- b) Failing to keep their eyes on their opponent. Many students turn their back to their opponent after striking. At all times you must keep your eyes on your opponent.
- c) Failing to land in a solid stance after striking. Tackling is not permitted in kumite, but in real life self-defense an opponent may try to tackle you to the ground. If your habit is to always land in a solid stance after striking then you will be able to successfully combat their attempts to do this. Some students strike then immediately get back to their fighting stance. Fighting stance however is not strong enough to withstand a tackle. Instead, after striking, move into a stable stance (such as a Sumo or Back stance) for a short time prior to retreating to fighting stance. Landing in this stance will not only give you more stability at close range, it will allow you to launch a secondary attack.
- d) Failing to distance yourself from your opponent once you have finished your attack/s. Toe-to-toe sparring is never ideal. A karate-ka should always be aware of this. Therefore after finishing your attack/s, always distance yourself again (by retreating back in stance, stepping to the side in stance, or passing the opponent in stance).
- e) Turning their back after striking. A common habit among

students in kumite is to turn their back after doing a reverse punch. This can become a natural (and bad) habit for a good reason. When we reverse punch, we aim to swing our hips forwards as quickly as possible into our reverse punch. But also, immediately after, in our attempt to create distance again we then try to swing our hips back in the opposite direction. It's in the 'swinging the hips back' process that we can over swing and end up with our back facing our opponent.

This is a dangerous habit because it means we are exposing a number of vulnerable areas to our opponent (such as our spine, kidneys, back of the head and neck etc).

» We cannot assume in real life that hitting an attacker will stop them in their tracks. Therefore we need to be facing our opponent at all times and in a state of constant awareness.

» So if you have picked up this habit, continue the goal of swinging the hips back quickly after the reverse punch, but don't let them over-turn you. If you are focused on returning back into a solid, low stance, then you will find it less likely to overdo the turn and put yourself in a compromising position.

7. Develop Your Go-No-Sen (Counter Strikes)

Once you achieve Orange belt, it's a good idea to start developing your counter-attacking ability. This involves blocking an opponent's strike or kick and then immediately after (while they are vulnerable) delivering your own counter strike. The Japanese term for this is 'go-no-sen'.

» The counter strike is one of the most important skills a karate-ka can develop. This is because in real life self-defense, a defender should always try to talk down an aggressor. Therefore it's most likely that should combat occur, the attacker will launch the first strike. This point is further illustrated by Gichen Funakoshi (the father of modern karate). Of his twenty precepts for training, the second was, "Karate ni sente nashi," which translates as, "There is no first strike in karate." For further evidence of the importance of the counter-strike, you will notice that all karate kata begin with a defensive technique.

» The keys for developing a counter strike are to maintain a solid fighting stance during the blocking process. Many students make the error of folding in stance while blocking. By blocking in a well-balance, poised stance, they may quickly transfer their weight forward to counter-strike.

» Anticipation strikes (like the pick off) are not suggested at Orange belt because they are highly advanced techniques that rely on precise technique, timing and control.

8. Introducing Round And Side Kicks

During our Yellow belt journey, it's best to develop one simple kick, the front kick. This is because when a beginner kicks they can find themselves in an unbalanced (thus vulnerable) position. The front kick is the easiest kick to maintain balance on as the hips and weight hardly shift.

» Now that you have reached Orange belt, it's good to

start developing your round and side kicks. Both of these require you turn your hips and alter your weight so it's important that you focus on:

- a) Keeping the base leg well bent (keeping you stable).
- b) Keep your hands up during the kick.
- c) Prepare the knee correctly and follow the true path of the kick (as you do in Basics).
- d) Shaping the foot correctly.
- e) Maintaining zanshin (continued state of awareness) after the kick.

9. Start Introducing Minimal Combination Attacks

The majority of your kumite should still be Ikken Hisatsu kumite. Ikken hisatsu is the principle promoted in first kata (taigyoku shodan). This means that the majority of our attacks are committed and focused singular attacks. This is because an attack has many components. To name just a few:

- a) Starting from perfect distance. Starting too far and you will fall short or hit with little power. Starting too close means your opponent is likely to strike first.
- b) Starting from and landing in a well-balanced stance.
- c) Using correct weight distribution from fighting stance, through to the strike and back immediately afterwards.
- d) Minimal telegraphing for both our strike and footwork, so we do not give away our intentions.
- e) Clean technique.
- f) Zanshin, our continued state of awareness after the attack.

Having achieved your Orange belt however means you have also been successfully assessed and graded on 2nd kata (Taigyoku nidan). During second kata we start to put two techniques together (eg punch then kick, or kick then punch). This starts to prepare us for combination attacks.

» But again, following the principles (or journey) laid out in our kata, we keep our combination attacks to a minimum, perhaps to 2 attacks at most. These do not necessarily have to be a punch and a kick. The techniques in second kata are merely examples of what you might use. Any technique will work for you if you first work for it. Throwing two punches or two kicks, or a back fist followed by a punch etc can all work.

» It's advised that you keep your combination attacks to two techniques. This does not mean however, that you are not permitted to throw three or four if you want to. When assessing you kumite afterwards, ask yourself the following questions:

- a) Did my combination attacks feel less balanced than my individual attacks?
- b) Did the techniques used in my combinations attacks feel less powerful than my individual attacks?
- c) Did my zanshin (continued state of awareness) suffer after my combinations attacks?
- d) Did I lose my footwork and quality of stances when executing my combination attacks? Many students

when executing multiple attacks start running instead of moving through using footwork.

- e) Did my technique suffer when executing my combination attacks?

Most students will find that their quality of technique (including footwork, weight distribution, zanshin etc) will suffer as they put more techniques together. Therefore it's advised that the majority of your techniques are singular (focusing on all components of the technique) and that you start to add combinations of two techniques maximum (for now). Remember, this is a journey, and you will continue to develop skills and add to your sparring style.

10. Stay Relaxed And Let It Develop Over Time

With a number of new techniques and principles to focus on it's very easy for a student to start expecting it all to come together quickly. With this expectation they place on themselves, along with their usual nerves and/or excitement for kumite, it's common to see them tense up.

» REMEMBER: Both your mind and body work best when they are relaxed.

» You don't have to perfect these right away. They are merely things to start thinking about. The most important thing you can do is relax and let it develop naturally. Focus on developing one or two things at a time so that you do not get mentally flustered. A mind clouded with too many thoughts often transcends into scrappy, poor-quality footwork, stances, strategy and technique.

» Give yourself time to learn and develop your skills. Develop patience and understanding that what you are learning is something you will continue to develop for the rest of your life. Enjoy the journey!