

"My first Experience with the San Kyu Exam"

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I was not sure what to expect for my first rank testing at The Gi Yu Dojo. I did the normal pre-test steps I normally do. Stretching, mentally picturing my techniques, trying to remove the nervous feeling. It seemed to go away until we were ready to start. Then we bowed in and I saw for the first time almost all the black belts together getting ready to test me on my application and knowledge of the techniques for my first rank test, San Kyu - green belt.

Intimidated is a word that would apply in that situation. However, I believed I knew the material and would pass and that feeling of intimidation went away. All of them were in my same spot, if they can do it, so can I. During the testing I had hoped to do each of the techniques a couple of times, however I was only asked to do each technique once. I was not sure if that was a good sign or a bad sign.

Mistakes were made, I knew that as I was completing some of the techniques, I felt I paused too much and/or it was not fluid, or I did not turn enough, I didn't keep myself straight/level, I didn't sink my hips low enough, lots of negative thoughts. I did not know how stringent the testing requirements were. I learned they are very stringent. I know the standard I hold myself to, and I can honestly say although I thought I did well enough to pass, I know I can do better.

The testing atmosphere was intense. There is a sense of purpose, expectation, and intent that was weighted in the atmosphere. You can feel the gazes of the black belts looking at your intent in the technique, the purpose with which you apply yourself, and the expectation of execution of the technique with what each of them believes to be correct. This aspect was made evident in reviewing the grading papers for the testing techniques. Each Black Belt saw something different, some saw no mistakes, some saw small ones. Your growth continues in how you apply each of their own interpretations and apply it to your own.

My favorite part of the test was the Randori. I really like the sparring part the best. I like the challenge of facing off against an opponent. I like seeing if I can spot the openings that they leave, the “tells” that they have before attacking. However, in this instance I was doing something I have never had to do before in testing. I could only evade and not counter strike. That seemed so very strange and so difficult for me. I was used to sparring in a way that I would purposefully take a hit in the gut if I knew your head was going to be open for a hit. This new twist was hard to adjust too. The different kamae's we learned, I tried. However, I never felt comfortable, with any of the different stances. Is this something I need to get used to, or is this the result of figuring out a new style and how to make it work for me.

Randori continued with the addition of the Shinai and Yari. I was at a few sword classes, and I learned a stance that pushed your gut out in front as the primary target. I never thought it would work, but I was extremely tired at that point so I thought I would give it a try. It worked! I was surprised, I don't know how obvious the technique was, for those watching, but I tried it at least as well as I thought I could without having a weapon, which was in hand when I learned the stance. I tried it again, but I think my distance was off and I couldn't duplicate the initial success. Being extremely winded at that point, I just did my best to get out of the way. I got hit a bunch of times and remember thinking, there went an arm, I'm dead, I didn't move enough etc. Then came the Yari, or spear. I have never seen a single technique with that weapon and had no idea what to expect. That weapon last when you are tired, bruised, starting to get sore, is tough. I think I managed to avoid a couple of the attacks, but not many. This was probably the hardest part of the test, but also my favorite. I have no idea how well or poorly I did on the randori as that is not a graded part but rather a “spirit ” builder per Sukh Sensei. I would like to hear ways to improve for future testing. Only later on when I was resting did I think about using the terrain to my advantage. There are several poles in the dojo that would make certain sword and spear techniques easier to avoid. I don't know if using that to your advantage is allowed or not. I will need to think further on it and inquire.

Overall, I am looking forward to the next testing seminar and I hope to be able to attend more of the events during the next one. I had a great time and look forward to learning and growing my experiences with the Gi Yu Dojo.