

The background of the entire page is a repeating pattern of light blue silhouettes of a person in various Taekwondo poses, such as stances, kicks, and blocks, arranged in a grid.

# **Teaching Kukkiwon Taekwondo**

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Written in February 2023

# I. Introduction

Taekwondo (태권도) is a physically demanding and mentally complex Korean martial art, formed by the founders of the major martial arts in the 1950's. Outside of Korea most practitioners are taught how to perform Taekwondo, maybe compete in it, but rarely are taught how to teach this art that so many of us have fallen in love with.

Over the three decades that I've been teaching Taekwondo, I've also experienced training with some of the world's best Grandmasters and instructors; on Kukkiwon master and poom/dan examiner courses, individual private lessons in senior Grandmasters' dojangs and with my own (now sadly deceased) instructor Grandmaster Pan, Sim-woon (posthumous Kukkiwon 10th Dan).

I've seen how other grandmasters teach Taekwondo, how instructors/coaches of other sports teach their sports, researched many topics and came up with a method of teaching modern Kukkiwon Taekwondo that works really well for all ages. I'm also using these methods to prepare my own master-level students for running their own dojangs.

## 2. Teaching children and adults - what is the difference?

A lot of first time instructors treat all their white belt students the same, the same drills and the same requirements. However, children and adults are very different - in the amount of information they can soak up, the speed with which they generally act on feedback and make corrections, and their raw physical ability based on muscle strength (major and core muscles).

### 2.1 Physical and psychological differences

Let me start with a huge warning - the following differences are talking in general terms! There will be some children who are absolute martial arts prodigies, wise beyond their years and can soak up corrections and implement them immediately. There will be some adults that could cause a saintly instructor to question whether they should even be an instructor.

All students are unique individuals and you can't always just teach a whole group and have them make identical progress. Knowing the differences in general terms may help you to tailor your teaching methods to get the best results in the shortest times. Or it may at least give you back a little sanity when you are despairing that your 6 year old students will never progress as fast as your 21 year old students.

### 2.2 Young children

Children from 4 to 10 years old are in the most formative stage of their life from a sports and physical development point of view. At this stage they are motivated easily, a few words of encouragement here, a high-five there and they'll be happy little monsters! They feed off encouragement, so give it freely. If their technique gets a tiny little bit better or they do something you've asked them to do (turn that foot more, clench their fist correctly, etc), then praise them and they will soak up the changes like a sponge.

At this stage, they have very little muscle strength however. The strength they do have is in the major muscle groups, such as the quadriceps down the front of the thigh, the biceps and triceps that form the main muscles of the upper arm, etc. Their core strength and ability to control the stability of their body while standing in unnatural positions will be minimal. Even movement between positions can be shaky/wobbly and when landing in the stance for the next step, they may land inaccurately.

Any drills given to children should be careful that they are pitched at both their mental interest level and their physical ability level. So good examples are ones involving running/chasing/throwing/catching, rather than hopping/balancing or drills involving significant memory or evaluation skills.

### 2.3 Pre-teens and Teens

This is the age I feel where humans are at their least emotionally stable. They are growing in to almost-adult physiques, with sometimes a child-like viewpoint, sometimes an adult-like viewpoint and sometimes a completely alien-like viewpoint. This can be quick to switch from loving something to

hating it. Fortunately, martial arts are often a very calm pursuit for these animals overflowing with hormones. With enough mental challenge to occupy their mind without invoking an emotional response, coupled with enough physical core strength to be able to be really challenged they can be a joy to teach.

It's too easy though for instructors to start to treat these children as adults, they can reach adult height easily (my own barely 14 year old son is 6 foot tall, 183cm, at the time of writing) so are sometimes incorrectly treated/judged as adults. An important thing to remember is that with the growth spurts comes a sudden lack of co-ordination, their limbs are suddenly longer than expected, and suddenly weaker/stiffer because the muscles and connective tissues are struggling to grow in line with the new bone length.

They also therefore may be more injury prone than both the more elastic qualities of young children and the more seasoned (knowing their limits) bodies of adults, so care should be taken to encourage but not push them too hard.

## 2.4 Adults

I find it ironic when writing this section that I'm treating everyone from 18 to 100+ equally, but the fact of that matter is that even within a given adult age bracket not all students are equal. So with that said - what is common? Generally adults are more aware of or in touch with their bodies, they know their limits and can generally be trusted to say "I really can't do that, or I'm too tired *today* to do that". This isn't to say that you shouldn't help them to push their limits, to increase their physical capabilities, but just that if they really resist that their judgement can be trusted.

Another difference from pre-teen/teen to adults is that adults get older, their physical ability, fitness and flexibility easily diminishes. So older practitioners can often prefer to practice poomsae and self-defence, rather than sparring and acrobatic jumping/spinning kicks. So if you have students of every age, you are likely to see a transition from more athletic to more detail-focused preferences in terms of Taekwondo practice.

This is something to be celebrated - both that people of different ages have different perspectives and preferences and that Taekwondo as a martial art can cater to all of them.

### 3. Key aspects for instructors

Regardless of what aspect of Taekwondo you're teaching, there are a number of key factors that you always need to be mindful of. These will help you ensure an optimal learning environment for your students.

#### 3.1 Know the skill

The first and most important step is to ensure you know the skill. You need to build up a good mental model of it, every step and every detail. I recommend that all masters a) ensure ongoing Continued Professional Development by attending courses such as Kukkiwon's Master Instructor Course and Poom/Dan Examiner Course, and b) always research in to accurate movement techniques. You can pause a video on YouTube and use the < and > buttons on your keyboard to go frame-by-frame slow motion.

#### 3.2 Spot the difference

When you know what's correct, the second key factor is to ensure that you are acutely observing the student and evaluating their performance against the known standard. This is key, and it's like the Spot the Difference puzzles common internationally. Personally I tend to do a quick systematic flow through the finish position (start at feet position and compare to Kukkiwon accurate stance diagrams, then work up through the legs, waist position, arm position, etc), then go deeper to consider how they got to the starting position of the movement and whether the body moved through the correct shape as the movement progressed.

#### 3.3 Positioning

Where you position yourself as an instructor may even be the most important factor for ensuring success when teaching at least more than one student.

Firstly, you need to position yourself so you can see all students in your group. This is key for being able to "Spot the Difference" and it makes that task so much easier, because often the majority will be correct with one or two doing something incorrectly. So it's much easier to spot that difference when you have a large sample size. Ensure you stand far enough away from the group you can see them all, and let your eye naturally be drawn to those doing something different. If you move close to make an adjustment, always reset back to your visibility position before you then continue the exercise.

Secondly, your students need to be able to see you perform the movement or sequence, in order for them to copy you well. This may mean that you have to do it facing away from them (so they can clearly see which hand/foot to use), or it may mean that you have to mirror the movement or rotate your position, so they can see the detail you are trying to specifically call out. Also bear in mind whether you want to encourage students to move out of position in order to get a better view, or maintain position due to limited space, or a young age or other considerations.

## 4. Teaching new movements

When you're teaching any new movement to students, be it a basic motion to a beginner or an advanced movement to a master-level student, there are common steps that you should be able to follow in order to have successful knowledge transfer:

### 4.1 Break it down in to steps

Anyone that has trained with instructors in Korea will know that they excel at breaking movements down in to component parts, and that's something for international instructors to emulate. Lots of instructors think in terms of "preparation, action" or "preparation, intermediate, action", but you can go even further. As an example, think of the reaction hand in most Taekwondo hand techniques pulling back to the waist - you can break that down in to two parts: pull the hand back (but keep it palm down) so the elbow is at the side, then complete pulling and rotate. Apply this same philosophy to all movements, break it down in to multiple steps.

### 4.2 Drill individual steps

Once you know the steps you have, you can repeat each step individually multiple times with you counting each time. Then add on a step and repeat, counting through each step of each repetition. This allows you to go from something super simple to really complex, but each time to you add something on you keep the same feeling of success.

### 4.3 Combine steps verbally

Once the students have the individual steps, they can be told to go through the steps in their own head, every time you count a single time. It's OK at this point if they count out loud the steps after you count for the whole move.

### 4.4 Add fluidity with a single count

However, one of the keys during learning movements is to ensure that you teach the student to have connection of the parts. If there is a pause or a stop in motion during the movement then the student will lose the power and the acceleration during the movement. So it's OK them thinking step-by-step as they learn, but they need to quickly change to flowing style.

### 4.5 Isolate and repeat

Instructors are human, it can feel very disappointing if a student doesn't learn a technique, even though you've taught it exactly the same way you have taught it to countless others. The important thing to remember is to trust the process. If they have had success when going step by step, just go back to that and repeat. Repeat until they can't get it wrong, and then build up again. This is not a failure as an instructor!

#### **4.6 Physical contact**

If they can't perform one of the steps (it just doesn't "click" for them) or aren't able to do the movement absolutely properly, you should move their body in the correct way. Obviously we have to be careful to ensure all contact is appropriate, but it can be invaluable in ensuring accurate movements and we shouldn't be afraid of that in these modern times (where in some jurisdictions you have to be really careful about contact between instructors and students).

I saw an interesting example of a Gracie Jiu Jitsu instructor course by Grandmaster Rorion Gracie. He asked one of the instructor candidates to instruct a blindfolded person across the room to pick up a bottle of water. The instructor candidate gave the expected steps of "take ten steps forward, turn to your left, two steps forward, no wait, not that big, back a half step" and it took ages. GM Gracie then demonstrated how he would teach it. He took hold of the blindfolded person's wrist, led them across the room, bent them over and put their hand on the bottle. This demonstrates that it can be much quicker to just move someone's body and have them feel internally that motion than to try to describe it increasing levels of details.

#### **4.7 Never change from bad-to-good, always repeat**

One key mistake instructors make when they are teaching a new movement or part of poomsae or similar is that the student makes a mistake, maybe they used the wrong hand, or did the wrong move, and the instructor just corrects the final position "put your left hand out not your right, now make your stance a little longer". By doing this, the student's brain takes a long time to learn the correct motion. By making them go back and repeat doing it correctly, we can make the most of the "ERN" (Error Related Negativity) which causes more synapses to fire (aiding learning) by reinforcing the correct "muscle memory" at the that time (muscles don't have memory, but it's a common phrase to mean the brain's ability to remember a specific movement and do it repeatably).

## 5. Students' first lessons

When students contact you about training at your dojang (도장, training centre) you should be prepared for answering their questions. Common questions can be about the costs, what is involved in the training at the start, required clothing, etc. These can vary from locality to locality. You may also have questions of them such as whether they have previous martial arts experience, health conditions and why they want to start. The key part is you need to consider both lists of questions ahead of time, add to the lists as new questions come up, and try to have answers ready for the students' questions.

On their first lesson, it's normally wise to tell students to copy along with the warm-up, but to remind them not to feel stressed if they can't do some of the exercises, either through co-ordination and physical conditioning. Over time they will become used to them.

Every dojang has their own syllabus for coloured belt ranks, but as an example one, our dojang teaches the following to white belts.

### 5.1 Basic positions

We take the student through the basic stances - moa seogi (모아 서기), naranhi seogi (나란히 서기), juchoom seogi (주춤 서기) and ap seogi (앞 서기). As we'll be consistent, we use the English terms and the Korean terms together. We take the students through the specification for each stance, described in terms of foot lengths, and have them practice just stepping. We also cover the basic etiquette of bowing correctly (30° from the waist, 45° at the neck and eyes down) and performing joonbi (준비). The instructor will model the correct movement alone first, then a few times alongside the students, then letting the students do it without demonstration, while correcting them. The key to correct Taekwondo performance is accurate instruction by the instructor and plentiful repetition by the student.

### 5.2 Basic hand techniques

The four basic hand techniques I'd recommend teaching are punching (지르기), inward blocking (몸통 막기), low blocking (내려 막기) and high blocking (얼려 막기). We use this opportunity to explain that almost all Taekwondo hand techniques have a twist in the final 20% of the movement. When we teach punching we have all beginners perform a shout (기합) on each punch. This can feel embarrassing for some new students, so we ensure we get them over that fear/embarrassment on their very first day.

We also ensure that each movement is broken down in to multiple steps. For example to teach a low block, we would start with the left arm in a correct finished position, then show how to raise the right fist to the crease of the shoulder; bring the right fist down the arm and at the last split second rotate the right arm in to the final finish position, and pull the left arm back to the waist. We'll break each step down in to a numbered count, so we can just build up by repeating "1...1...1...", then add in a second step "1...2...1...2" and then add in the next and so-on. By breaking each movement down in to a really small step, it leaves little for the student to get wrong.



### 5.3 Basic kicks

The four basic kicks we teach are front kick (앞차기), push kick (밀로 차기), axe kick (내려 차기) and turning kick (돌려 차기). This covers upwards kicking, linear kicking, downward kicking and inward kicking. As for when we teach the basic hand techniques, we break each kick down in to multiple steps, paying careful attention to items like the striking part (foot position), standing foot turn angle, tight chamber and maintaining an active guard (arms held up, not flailing around).

As soon as possible during kicking practice we have students kicking paddles. This ensures that they get the motivation from the sound of a well performed kick, and it also helps to differentiate Taekwondo from Karate, as Karate clubs near us often don't use modern training aids.

### 5.4 Important principles

There are four important principles that we believe are key to great Taekwondo performance, so we try to introduce them during the first few sessions.

The first is um-yang, symbolising opposites such as light/dark, male/female, soft/hard. This is manifested in Taekwondo by performing preparation phases for movements softly, then the action quickly and with power. We want students to immediately be feeling the difference.

The second is that the hand and foot should finish moving at the same time while stepping and performing Taekwondo hand techniques. Force equals mass times acceleration, so the practitioner can add power to a movement simply by ensuring that they add the mass of the step to the movement, rather than separate them in to the footwork and then the hand technique as separate actions.

The third principle is that power is developed by accelerating smoothly through the movement. Tension should only be present at the final split second of the movement, and early tension slows down overall power. My late Grandmaster Sim Pan explained this using a firework sound analogy, that woooosh sound is how Taekwondo hand techniques build power.

The final principle is that Taekwondo power comes from this hips/waist. Most often if a technique is weak, it's a failure to correctly rotate the body that causes it. This can be true if a low block is performed incorrectly when the shoulders are raised and dropped to bring the block down. When done correctly it should be rotated through the waist so the power is delivered as an untwist, rather than focusing on the down movement. The same thing is visible in a side kick, if a first step is to twist the upper body, before the kicking leg chambers. This untwisting through the core adds power and stability to the movement.

## 6. Warm-up, stretching and cooldown

It's very important that you prepare your body for the demands that will be placed upon it before every training session. Traditional warm-ups involved holding stretched positions for about an 8 second count, this is known as static stretching. Modern sports science (Kurz 2003) has shown this to be ineffective for neither preparing the body for demanding physical activity where optimal performance is desired, nor for increasing flexibility in the shortest time possible or to the maximal extent possible.

The best way of preparing for a physical activity is to raise the body temperature by 1°C by doing exercises such as jogging and bodyweight exercises like press-ups and crunches. Then to perform "dynamic stretching" (Kurz 2003), where each muscle is stretched fairly quickly (although carefully) from a relaxed position through a range of movement, increasing the maximum stretch over the repetitions. For example, performing this with front leg raises (앞차올리기) or side leg raises (옆차올리기) or with rotations of the body. Doing this for all the major muscles prepares the body optimally for rapid contraction and high flexibility motions such as Taekwondo kicks.

If you're looking to increase your student's flexibility, then the preferred method is to perform Proprioceptive Neuromuscular Facilitation (PNF) or "isometric stretching" (Kurz 2003). This method is trying to reset the subconscious Golgi reflex (the natural tension you feel when your muscle won't go further). The steps are that you take a muscle to almost the maximally stretched position, then tense that muscle for 8-10 seconds, after that immediately (within one second or you lose the effect) you stretch further. Repeat this 4-5 times. However, this is very tiring for the muscles, so it's recommended you only do it 3 times per week, with a rest day in between and not before training (so not part of the warmup).

After the training session, lots of instructors lead their students through an "active cooldown" (Van Hooren and Peak, 2018). The belief was that an active cooldown helped to reduce lactic acid build-up, reduce injury occurrence and promote faster recovery. However, scientific research is that there is actually a much smaller set of benefits. The research shows that active cooldowns are largely ineffective with respect to enhancing same-day and next-day(s) sports performance, do not appear to prevent injuries, and don't necessarily reduce lactic acid build-up in muscle tissue (potentially reducing it in the blood stream, but the body will deal with that anyway).

Two possible and scientifically valid plans for stretching therefore are:

1. Raise core temperature, dynamic stretching, intense training, technical training, isometric stretching
2. Raise core temperature, isometric stretching, technical training, intense training

## 7. Poomsae training

Poomsae are set sequences of basic movements, theoretically self-defence situations, but in reality practised more for health and an understanding of the core principles of Taekwondo. The Kukkiwon poomsae series for coloured belts is really well formulated to progress in technical complexity throughout the ranks. However, it can be difficult for students to learn the required movement order.

### 7.1 Teaching the poomsae

Over the years I've tried a few different ways of teaching students a new poomsae. Far and away the best method I've found is to stick to "paragraphs" of 4-6 movements of the new poomsae and learn each paragraph over 2-3 lessons, each building off the finish position of the already learnt portions. The first lesson is just memorisation of the movements. The second and third lessons are polishing details. That level of polish can be how to turn correctly, when to breath and when to combine multiple movements to a single count, or minute details on the movement's accuracy points.

We tend to do a preliminary lesson or two before starting on the paragraphs, teaching students all of the new movements in their next poomsae in either line drill format, or just standing still in parallel stance (나란히 서기). This gives students the chance to understand how the movements are correctly performed without having to be concerned of what comes first/next.

Another aspect it so ensure when students have learned the complete poomsae, that you practice it in different starting directions. If students always learn that you "turn towards the windows" or "turn to face the door", on a special event or competition, or any unfamiliar environment, they may be unable to successfully complete the poomsae. So they need to get used to which direction (clockwise or anti-clockwise) and how far to turn, rather than turning to face a particular thing.

### 7.2 Advanced drills and competitors

To improve students poomsae for advanced performance such as higher grade tests and poomsae competitions, there are a number of drills that can be performed. The first and easiest is to break down a complex combination, step or part of a poomsae and repeat it many times, outside of the context of the rest of the poomsae. This gives the chance to learn and improve a difficult portion many more times within a class than if the whole poomsae was repeated.

Another useful drill is to repeat a paragraph of a poomsae with multiple people holding paddles around the practitioner. This can be helpful to ensure each movement is properly visualised and power is applied correctly to the targets.

Practicing poomsae in pairs or triples can also be useful to ensure that the cadence and rhythm are regular, because a Taekwondoin going too slow or too fast will not fit in with the synchronisation. A way of aiding students in doing this is to setup a metronome to make a regular timed click. This can act as a count to ensure that everyone is on the same timing.

Group watching of poomsae performances and scoring of them can assist with students natural nerves at being observed as well as aiding in improving the evaluative skills that will be necessary as they progress through to master and examiner rank.

## 8. Sparring

While we've developed a sparring syllabus of short 15-20 minute segments, they are based around the following progression.

### 8.1 Movement and protection

Various footwork steps are key to effective sparring, enabling quick and fluid movement as well as the ability to attack and counter-attack effectively. Before students learn to spar, they learn various basic blocking motions - so it's natural they come to their first sparring session and they want to apply those blocks when their opponent attacks. So one of the module covers both covering the body (rather than extending the arms away from the body to be kicked by the opponent) and head movement to avoid being kicked in the head, rather than moving the arms in the way of the kick and leaving the body exposed.

### 8.2 Attacking techniques

Of particular importance to the modern WT sparring game is the use of the front foot. We start by covering all the variations of using the front foot cut kick. Then we move on to adding in second kicks in a combination or at least quick followup, both without putting the foot down and with doing so. We cover landing head kicks, with control for use in the club (we don't want to dissuade inexperienced Taekwondoin from continuing Taekwondo due to heavy head kicks). We cover short, middle and long distance and which attacks are best to use from which distance, as well as moving between them. We define short as arm-length apart or closer, aka "clinch" distance. Middle distance is within leg length, so either player could lift and kick, aka "danger zone". Long distance is outside leg length, so requires footwork in order to attack, aka "safe zone".

### 8.3 Counter-attacking techniques

We start off covering simple countering techniques such as lifting the front foot in a cut kick, turning kick or hook kick to the body, or using the back leg in an upward turning kick or short kicking style. We from there move on to closing down (i.e. quickly going to short distance when the attacker comes in) and what to do in the clinch, including kicks that work at clinch range and pushing.

We also ensure that covering the hogu with the defenders arms is maintained during counter-attacking.

### 8.4 Strategic/tactical considerations

The final modules cover tactical considerations such as how to counter a cut kick, someone closing in to clinches or how to deal with pressure when near the boundary line of the ring. It also covers strategic considerations such as how to deal with a larger or smaller opponent, someone more aggressive or passive than yourself.

If we consider the rock-paper-scissors game where every technique (or style) has a weakness and a strength, a similar thing exists with attack-counter-trap as three styles or aspects of Taekwondo sparring. Attackers are beaten by a good Counter attacker (the counter kicker will be well practised at responding to common attacks, so just has to wait for them). A Counter attacker can be beaten by a Trap fighter (where an attack is feinted to draw out a predicted counter, at which point it's countered back). And a Trap fighter is beaten by a strong Attacker (because the attacker can just ignore the traps and attack strongly). Ideally a player should know all three styles and be able to switch between them during a match.

This brings up a final key skill for Taekwondo sparring - the analytical aspect of the game. We often explain this to our students as "looking for the 'they always...' or 'they never...' parts". If you can notice that your opponent only throws a cut kick with their right foot and when it's forward, you can almost discount it if their left foot is forward. This can be very hard during a heated competition bout, but is a very useful skill for elite athletes and for their coaches too. Encouraging students to think this way will get them in the right habits.

## 9. Self-defence

Taekwondo was obviously built as both a martial art for actual defence as well as a training system for improving the body, mind and spirit. The defensive part of the art is not lost and has in recent years been expanded through works such as Master Jeong, In-choul's books on applying Taekwondo to the real world as well as Kukkiwon's expanded self-defence syllabus. For as far back as I can remember,

### 9.1 One-step sparring

Taekwondo has had one-step sparring, where known routine defences against a single punch are practised. This still exists but is done from a more realistic starting position. Originally it was done from a long stance low block position, with a shout (기합) from the attacker; then they wait for a shout from the defender, who is waiting in a traditional ready position (준비/나란히 서기) before stepping in to a long stance middle punch. This position and shout routine took place before every single punch attack.

In recent years this has been changed. Now both Taekwondoin stand in left foot forward sparring stance. A shout from both practitioners at the start of the session is done, and after that the only shouts are on the final counter-attacking movement - the pair are required to be alert and ready to defend from the known attack at any moment. The attack is still a long stance punch, but now done to the head only.

I did ask the Kukkiwon instructor during the self-defence portion of the Kukkiwon International Master Instructor Course at the Kukkiwon in 2016 why the attack is only done as a right handed punch. The answer given was that 90% of punch attacks on the street are right handed, so we practice for the most common situation, and natural reaction and movement will take care of the rare cases. This seems like a very pragmatic approach.

### 9.2 Self-defence

Another long-term practised system is defence against various grabs and holds. We have carried a core set of important values during the practice of these defences. Firstly that they must be safe - if used on the street the practitioner should be safe from the attack, but also if used in the dojang then it should be safe for the trainer partner. Secondly they must be effective and work in a real world scenario, for example a punch to the back of the skull is more likely to break than hand than it would take the fight out of the attacker. Thirdly and finally, they must be grade appropriate - if a lower coloured belt tries a high Dan level technique they likely won't understand the nuance of the details, and if a high Dan practitioner does a lower coloured belt technique, they maybe haven't continued their education far enough.

In recent years, Kukkiwon Taekwondo has formalised techniques that would normally have been considered to have come from other arts, for example, hip throws from Judo, rear naked choke from Jiu-jitsu or elaborate wrist locks and throws from Hapkido. These have to be studied carefully to

understand the details of how to perform them correctly and optimally. It may be wise for senior Taekwondo to learn some of other arts as well, as Taekwondo is still growing in this area.

### **9.3 “Real world” Taekwondo**

Students often ask why we do basic techniques in such an elaborate way rather than from a sparring stance where they would be more directly applicable. I generally explain with a reference to the Karate Kid movies starring Ralph Macchio. The basic movements are about building up “muscle memory”, that is the co-ordination of major muscle contractions as well as strength building in minor muscle groups in order to be able to perform the movement swiftly and with power.

Once that muscle memory is built up, the same skills can be applied from other more relaxed and natural positions. Some instructors around the world (such as Master Jeong, In-choul) are building up syllabuses, books and videos around how to adjust Taekwondo basic techniques to work in the real world.

This is a new and rapidly developing area of Taekwondo, and it can be of great benefit for instructors to teach these techniques and show students how they are an application of the same basics they already know.



## 10. Destruction

The breaking of wood, tiles, bricks and other materials (격파) have long been a part of Taekwondo. Instructors should consider when is appropriate for students to do this, for example, it's commonly acceptable for under 16s to only attempt to break 10mm thick pine, rather than a full 20-25mm thick piece). This is for instructors to determine using advice from senior practitioners, national governing body and local rules to their country.

In any event the steps to ensuring a successful break are fairly consistent.

Firstly ensure the technique is correct in the air and on softer targets such as paddles. This is the lowest risk to the student, so the best time to catch early mistakes.

Secondly practice the technique on more solid padding such as an Iranian shield or power shield. This has little give to it, so will ensure correct alignment of joints, or non-permanent pain will show the inaccuracy.

Thirdly ensure the student knows how to line up against the board/material, the angle and height it should be held at, and ensure they can slowly measure the technique up, aiming to hit the middle of the material.

Finally the holders should be educated on how to correctly hold a board, if it's being hand-held. For 20-25mm boards, I would always recommend two senior students or black belts acting as holders where practical. They should have a minimal amount of fingers showing on the front of the board. They should also aim to choose which foot is standing forward, to reduce the risk of boards dropping on their toes. Finally they should be conscious that the board may quickly come towards their faces, so they should ensure they turn their faces away from the break. The board should be held rigidly - any movement in the board due to bent arms or not leaning body weight forward may suck power from the technique when it's performed.

## 11. Promotion tests

An important part of teaching Taekwondo is assessing students progress through the curriculum. Taekwondo has a built-in way of handling this, via our ranking system. There are still things to consider though when building out how you grade your students.

### 11.1 Syllabus

There are numbered Taegeuk poomsae, so they can map fairly well to coloured belt grades. Adding in some WT style sparring is required too, as is some destruction. Those are pretty much the requirements for Kukkiwon 1st Dan, the rest of what you choose to add is up to you. Personally I would recommend adding some self-defence in there - both from grabs and punches. You need to consider technical progression from beginner to ready-for-Dan-ranks and build your syllabus accordingly. I include a copy of our coloured belt requirements as Appendix 1 as an example.

### 11.2 What is the grading

How you feel about the grading is up to you. Is it a true test of your students, where they will have no idea of whether they're likely to pass or fail ahead of time? Or is the hard work done before the day, and the day is just a chance to prove you can still do things under the pressure of the day.

I choose to do two weeks of pre-grading assessments before each grading for all students that are eligible (both enough time since their last grading, and have attended enough sessions since it). For the grading they must pass with a minimum of 70%, then on the actual testing day, in line with Kukkiwon requirements it's 60% minimum pass mark.

Some masters, particularly in the USA tend to treat the testing as if it's a marathon - demonstrate everything you've ever learnt, while fasting and after a 10 mile run. Maybe that's a little hyperbolic but the point remains. It's your choice whether the test is enough to assess them on or extensive is a personal choice. I think this also can be depending on the amount you charge your students. As a non-profit ethos dojang, I don't feel the need to require an extensive test to justify an expensive test.

Whatever the instructor decides is up to them, but the above thoughts should be considered before the instructor decides how they want their dojang to be run.

## Conclusion

Throughout this thesis I've given tips from my decades teaching Taekwondo to a variety of students, but the key takeaways for me are: a) there are always new things to learn from others, both inside and outside of Taekwondo, and b) don't be close minded and think that the way you've always done things is the best.

It's entirely OK to try to teaching something for the first time in a different way and see how you connect with that different method, and then to analyse if you felt that the student picked up the content faster or better. It's also OK to say "actually my previous way worked better", but at least then you know you're teaching in the best way you can.

The key is that you're thinking about it. Your journey through the coloured belt ranks, then through some of the black belt ranks was a journey of learning new things - your master journey doesn't need to be any different, except that the new things are now based more around how well you can teach others.

## **Bibliography & useful resources**

Thomas Kurz, *Stretching Scientifically*, 2003, Stadion Press, ISBN 1591780128

Bas Van Hooren and Jonathan M. Peake, Do We Need a Cool-Down After Exercise? A Narrative Review of the Psychophysiological Effects and the Effects on Performance, Injuries and the Long-Term Adaptive Response, 2018 Apr 16, *Sports Med*, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5999142/>

Kukkiwon Textbook 5 book set, ISBN 9791191659085

Martial Arts Instructors Desk Reference, Sang H. Kim, Turtle Press, ISBN 1880336715

# Appendix I

## Stevenage Taekwondo coloured belt syllabus

### 9th Geup - Yellow Stripe

Sitting Stance Middle Punch

Short Stance Low Block

Short Stance Rising Block

Short Stance Inward Block

Front Kick

Push Kick

Axe Kick

Turning Kick

### 8th Geup - Yellow Belt

Taegeuk 1

Long stance double punch

Fast kick

Cut kick (back leg, fast-style, lift-and-hop)

Back kick

### 7th Geup - Green Stripe

Taegeuk 2

Taegeuk 1

Long stance inner forearm block

Long stance backfist front strike

Side kicks

One for one kicking

### 6th Geup - Green Belt

Taegeuk 3

Taegeuk 2

One for one kicking

Free Sparring

Destruction: Elbow strike

Destruction: Side kick

### 5th Geup - Blue Stripe

Taegeuk 4

Taegeuk 3

Three for Three kicking

Free sparring

Destruction: Reverse Turning Kick

### **4th Geup - Blue Belt**

Taegeuk 5

Taegeuk 4

One-step sparring

Free sparring

Destruction: back kick

Destruction: punch

### **3rd Geup - Red Stripe**

Taegeuk 6

Taegeuk 1-5 (Examiner's choice)

Taegeuk 1-5 (Student's choice)

One-step sparring

Self-defence (hand and collar grabs)

Free sparring

Destruction: Two breaks with anything

### **2nd Geup - Red Belt**

Taegeuk 7

Taegeuk 1-6 (Examiner's choice)

Taegeuk 1-6 (Student's choice)

One-step sparring

Self-defence (hand, collar and bear hug)

Free sparring

Destruction: Two breaks, both with the feet

### **1st Geup - Black Stripe**

Taegeuk 8

Taegeuk 1-7 (Examiner's choice)

Taegeuk 1-7 (Student's choice)

One-step sparring

Self-defence

Free sparring

Destruction: two breaks, both with the feet, one must be a jumping technique