

Introduction

Jigeiko (free-practice) is practised regularly at all clubs, and forms a crucial part of kendo training. This document has been created for the members of Southampton Kendo Club to explain the purpose of jigeiko, expected conduct, and to provide some practical points on how to get the most out of jigeiko.

Acknowledgements

Much of this document has been taken from the British Kendo Association's "Attitudes to Ji-geiko" article by Sotaro Honda, former GB squad coach.

The techniques to be used at each level are tied to the BKA's grading guidelines.

Both of these should be read and understood by all. Links to these documents are provided at the end.

Contents

Introduction	1
Acknowledgements	1
Contents	1
What is Jigeiko	2
Behaviour during jigeiko	2
What should I practice?	2
What techniques to use (kyu grades)	3
What techniques to use (1st to 2nd dan)	3
What techniques to use (3rd dan and above)	3
The use of tsuki in jigeiko	4
How to practice with someone senior	4
How to practice with someone the same level	4
How to practice with someone junior	5
Feedback during jigeiko	6
After jigeiko	6
References	6
Glossary	7

Purpose and Conduct of Jigeiko



What is Jigeiko

Jigeiko means free-practice. This is a chance to spar with a training partner to develop both your and their kendo. This is different to shiai-geiko (competitive practice).

It is important to remember that jigeiko is still practice, it is not a match. Your opponent is not an enemy to destroy, rather you are partners who should help each other to improve by working hard together. I have emphasised this by using the word partner instead of opponent throughout this document.

Behaviour during jigeiko

What should be expected of all kendoka when doing jigeiko, is that you make your partners feel that they want to have jigeiko with you again.

Before starting jigeiko, you must ensure your partner is aware of any accommodations you have, e.g. if you have an injury or are unable to receive tai-atari. If you are training with someone for the first time and their level is not immediately apparent, it is appropriate to ask their grade.

Jigeiko should be practised from a place of friendship and openness to learn. It is appropriate to have some friendly rivalry with peers, however this should not be taken too far.

You should not be overly-aggressive, especially when practicing with someone junior to you. This can come across as bullying behaviour and may be detrimental to the junior's progress. Against a senior partner, it will hinder their ability to lead the practice. Against a peer, it may cause frustration or escalate. Your intention must never be to hurt your partner.

If you find yourself getting angry or frustrated, or you have the 'red mist', you should stop and take time to calm down.

Likewise, if you feel unsafe at any point you should stop. You always have the right to refuse to train with a particular partner.

What should I practice?

Jigeiko is a chance to practice what has been taught during the session, while your partner is trying to practice the same on you. It is a chance to test the effectiveness of what you've been taught, and learn any areas you need to improve. It is a chance to cement the techniques you have been learning while under pressure.

Your sensei may have provided some 'areas of focus', which you can also train during jigeiko.

Try not to practice on too many things at once. You should refrain from being distracted by areas or techniques which are not your current focus.

Purpose and Conduct of Jigeiko



What techniques to use (kyu grades)

At kyu grade, you should be focusing on three strikes; men, kote, and do.

Be eager to initiate attacks. You should ensure you start at to-maai (long distance), stepping in to issoku-itto-no-maai (one-step, one-cut distance).

Attack with commitment, using fumikomi (stamping) footwork.

Focus on making your strikes on-target, and follow through with zanshin (posture and awareness) after the strike - even if the attack failed.

What techniques to use (1st to 2nd dan)

At early dan grades, you should continue to focus on shikake-waza (initiating techniques). Attacks should be made with intention and never random.

Be eager to initiate attacks. Focus on attacking with correct posture, ki-ken-tai-ichi (sword, spirit and body attacking in unison), and good zanshin (posture and awareness) after the strike.

You may start to chain attacks into nidan-waza (successive strikes). To do this, you will need to quickly assess the success of your attacks.

You may like to attempt ouji-waza(counter-attacks) if it was taught during the lesson.

What techniques to use (3rd dan and above)

At third dan and above, you have the entire repertoire of kendo techniques at your disposal. These should be applied as appropriate. Attacks should be made when opportune.

You should begin to control your partner, understanding their timing and intention. If your partner attacks well, you may like to practice ouji-waza (counter-attacks).

Purpose and Conduct of Jigeiko



The use of tsuki in jigeiko

The use of tsuki presents a higher risk of accident or injury than other attacks. Because of this it is given special consideration in many clubs.

If you are a kyu grade, you should not attempt tsuki in jigeiko unless specifically agreed with a senior dan grade partner.

At dan grade, if training with someone else who is a similar dan grade, you may begin to introduce tsuki to your practice. This should be done sparingly, and it is essential it is performed safely and only when the opportunity is correct. Tsuki should never be used against someone advancing on you - it can be dangerous. The opportunity for tsuki is when the opponent steps back away from you or is clearly backing off mentally and has lost focus.

When training with someone of a higher level, unless specifically agreed, you should avoid the use of tsuki. This is because you are trying to demonstrate your best kendo. You are unlikely to show technique in your tsuki which couldn't be better displayed in a men strike.

As a senior, when training with a kyu grade you should not perform tsuki. It is unlikely to be safely received. It is also likely to make your partner hesitant, discouraging your partner from attacking confidently.

How to practice with someone senior

If practicing with someone senior to you, they will be attempting to lead the practice and build you up. They should be providing you with a difficult, but attainable challenge.

You will need to attack with commitment and high spirits. Do not be afraid of being hit, but engage with confidence. Try to demonstrate your best kendo to your partner. If your attacks are failing, try to understand what is failing and adjust. If you struggle to understand what is going wrong, it is okay to stop and ask.

If you practice well, you might find your partner is performing ouji-waza (counter-attacks) on you. This is not a failing, rather it shows you are attacking with good commitment and the senior is comfortable to take some time to practice their own techniques.

How to practice with someone the same level

When practicing with a peer you will not be giving or receiving structured feedback. You should train earnestly, with good sportsmanship.

You may feel the need to not be struck, or to reply to every attack with one of your own. Try not to give in to these feelings. Rather, try to do correct kendo fulfilling the criteria of yuko-datotsu (a valid strike). If struck, appreciate the opportunity to learn why your partner's technique worked.

Purpose and Conduct of Jigeiko



How to practice with someone junior

When practicing with someone junior to you, you are taking on the role of teacher for the jigeiko. This does not mean teaching them anything you like - you should focus on reinforcing the lessons from earlier in the session. Your partner may let you know if they have been told an 'area of focus', in which case you may also incorporate that.

As the senior, you are responsible for ensuring your partner's safety. You should stop them from performing unsafe techniques. This may require you to be hyper-vigilant in some instances, e.g. when encouraging them to break your kamae (stance), you must be ready to withdraw if they act too recklessly and are liable to hurt themselves.

You should aim to act approximately half a grade above your partner. This is to give your partner an attainable challenge, so they are able to learn without being discouraged. This should be demonstrated in both technique and spirit. You want to avoid creating an indomitable aura which hinders your partner from attacking entirely.

To avoid being too aggressive, you should ensure you are ready to attack at all times, but only attack when you are sure it will teach your partner something. You may need to give your partner 'space to breathe', moments of respite so they can process what you are teaching them.

You may find it useful to practice larger attacks than normal, so your attacks are slowed to a similar speed to your partner. This will push them to attack faster to beat your speed.

If your partner is attacking with confidence, commitment and good spirit, and if your level permits, you may take the chance to practice ouji-waza. Be aware if your partner becomes hesitant, that you may need to build their confidence again before trying another.

One rule of thumb for kyu grades is you may attack once for every three of your partner's attacks. This allows them to gain confidence in attacking, but still get used to being attacked.

When against low-level kyu grades, it's best to stick to shikake-waza (initiating techniques) and debana-waza (pre-emptive techniques). Ouji-waza (counter-attacks) often disorient or discourage low-kyu grades from attacking.

Purpose and Conduct of Jigeiko



Feedback during jigeiko

During jigeiko, feedback from senior partners is often given by way of example. This is good, because it promotes learning and problem-solving in the moment. This is a very important skill for competitive kendo.

If you are training with someone senior to you, it is okay to stop and ask if something is unclear or you are not sure what they are trying to show you.

Likewise, if training with someone junior and you see they are getting frustrated or confused, or they are not grasping what you are showing, it is okay to stop and explain what you are showing them. Be clear with what you expect them to do differently.

Keep in mind that jigeiko is short, so you should not have an extended discussion.

After jigeiko

At the end of the session, after practicing with others in jigeiko, it is good to approach your partners and seek or give feedback.

As a junior it is useful to let a senior know if a particular exercise or description was well received.

As a senior it is good to reinforce some learning points, and appreciate the effort and progress made during the practice.

If there was something you didn't understand or didn't like, then it is essential to raise this to open a dialog and reach an understanding.

References

[1] British Kendo Association, Grading Guidelines:

<https://www.britishkendoassociation.com/a-guide-for-dojos-leaders-and-examiners/>

[2] Attitudes to Ji-geiko, Sotaro Honda PHd

<http://www.britishkendoassociation.com/attitudes-to-ji-geiko/>

Purpose and Conduct of Jigeiko



Glossary

debana-waza	pre-emptive techniques
do	a strike to the torso
issoku-itto-no-maai	one-step, one-cut distance
fumikomi	stamping footwork
jigeiko	free-practice
kamae	stance
kote	a strike to the forearm
men	a strike to the head
nidan-waza	successive techniques
ouji-waza	counter-techniques
shiai-geiko	competitive practice
shikake-waza	initiating techniques
to-maai	long distance
tsuki	a thrust to the throat
zanshin	remaining posture and awareness