

Etiquette in Martial Arts Training

Etiquette encompasses both an attitude of respect for others and a sense of self-esteem. Unless martial arts are practiced with a feeling of reverence and respect, they are simply forms of violence. Physical power without respect is no more than brute strength. For this reason martial arts must maintain etiquette from beginning to end.¹



The following rules of etiquette will help you to get the most out of your Tang Soo Do training. Your training is not just about learning techniques. It is also about learning to grow as a person into a respectable member of society.

- **Show respect for your training hall (*dojang*).**

When entering and exiting the *dojang*, salute the flags by placing your right hand over your heart, bow and say “*Ko map sumnida*” (formal “Thank you” in Korean), “*Tang Soo*”. Even if you aren’t recognized, it is to show respect for the space itself in which you learn Tang Soo Do. As you leave the *dojang*, salute the flags and back out of the door. This also applies to any area that is designated for a tournament or special event, even if it is not your regular training hall.

When walking onto or off of the mat, turn to face the flags and bow with your hand over your heart. Step backwards off the mat if you are leaving.

Do not walk on the mat with shoes. The surface is specially made to cushion bare feet and can be damaged by shoes. Do not bring food or drink on the mat, including chewing gum. Throw away your gum before entering class.

If you see trash on the floor or a spill, clean it up, even if you did not put it there.

Often, you will be asked to clean up after testing or class. Please do not run away from this. The work goes much quicker when everyone participates

¹ Paraphrased from The Twenty Guiding Principles of Karate: The Spiritual Legacy of the Master, Gichin Funakoshi, Translation by John Teramoto.

and the result is a nice clean mat and training area. Having a clean *dojang* makes it easier to concentrate on training.

- **Show respect for your uniform (*dobok*) and belt (*dee*).**

Always wear a clean *dobok* to train. Wash your *dobok* after every class and fold it so that it is not wrinkled. Do NOT wash your *dee*. This is a tradition in the martial arts. The *dee* and *dobok* symbolize the effort of your training. Fold them carefully when you are not wearing them, and do not leave them lying in a pile on the floor. Do not drag your *dee* along the ground or hang it around your neck. It should be tied around your waist or carried folded in your hand if you are not wearing it.

Your *dobok* is your training uniform. It should not be worn outside of karate class or karate school activities, except for travelling to and from class. Special permission may be given if students would like to give a talk or demonstration at their school, but this should be discussed with Sa Bom Nim Tullier first.

- **Show respect to your seniors and black belts (*dans*).**

Bow to any *dans* you pass, whether or not they acknowledge you. They are your seniors and have worked hard to attain their rank. They continue to work hard and give of themselves so that you may learn, as well. Address them by sir or ma'am, or Mr. <Last name>, Ms. <Last name>. Show similar respect to parents and adults.

If the person you are speaking to has earned a special title, such as Master (*Sa Bom Nim*) or Certified Instructor (*Kyo Sa Nim*), you may address them by that title.

When bowing, you should stand at attention with your toes touching and hands at your sides, then bend at the waist, lowering your eyes and head slightly. Juniors should bow slightly lower than their seniors.

- **Show respect to your instructors during class.**

Do not interrupt a class in progress. If you are late, stand at the edge of the mat and loudly ask for permission to enter class. If permission is given, bow and thank the instructor ("*Ko map sumnida*") then go to your proper place quickly.

When lining up in class, be sure you are in a straight line with your seniors. The senior student in a line is correct, so look to your right and adjust your position as needed.

Whenever you are given instructions, in or out of class, respond loudly with “Yes, sir” or “Yes, ma’am”, bow, and quickly do as you were told. If you have a question, come to attention and raise your hand until you are acknowledged, then bow and clearly state your question. After you are given an answer, bow and thank your instructor.

If you are called to the front of the room, come to attention and respond loudly with “Yes, sir” or “Yes, ma’am”, bow, say “*Ko map sumnida, Tang Soo*” with spirit, step back out of your line and run to your right behind your line before turning towards the front of the class. Stop at the senior line and bow to the most senior student, then continue to the front. To return to your line, go down the other side of the room and the back of your line, then run to your place and step forward into your spot.

If you need to leave class, come to attention, raise your hand, and wait to be acknowledged (unless it is an emergency). Once acknowledged by the instructor, ask permission to leave class. When permission is given, step out of line as above, running behind your line to your right. Bow off of the mat. If you need to use the bathroom and it is an emergency, you may leave the mat without permission, but still exit your line and the mat in the same way.

During class, maintain good posture and focus. Stay in position unless instructed otherwise. When at attention, toes should be touching, the palms of your hands should be flat against your legs at your side, and your head and eyes should be straight forward. You should be listening attentively for your next instruction.

At the beginning and end of class, the senior student will call commands. Show respect for your country by placing your hand over your heart to salute the flags, and then bow to the instructor. At the end of class you will also bow to the black belts attending the class. You should remain at attention while announcements are read, then you will turn to the right and follow the senior student, jogging, to bow and shake the hand of the

instructor. After shaking hands with the instructor, step back three paces before turning around.

- **Show respect to your training partner.**

When you shake hands with someone, show respect and humility by keeping your left hand flat, palm downwards, under your right elbow, and bowing. The junior should step towards the senior, if necessary, to shake hands. The junior should also bow slightly deeper than the senior. This is a formal Korean tradition that we continue as a part of our Korean martial arts training.

When you are handing a weapon or object to someone, use both hands, extend the handle (if it is a knife) towards them, and bow. When the exercise is finished, the junior student should collect the weapons, again bowing to accept the weapon from each senior in the same way it was given.

Do not let your uniform open up or your belt come untied during class. If your chest is showing, quickly adjust your *dobok*, even if you have not been told to do so. If you need to adjust your uniform (*dobok*), do so by turning around to the right. Fix your uniform and belt while facing away from your partner or class, then turn back around to the right to face your partner or the class again. During class, if the instructor calls everyone to attention and bows to you (sometimes they will also say “*Shope*”), you are expected to turn around and fix your uniform and belt before continuing with class.

- **Show respect to your fellow classmates.**

While in class, pay attention and follow instructions. Do not try to chat with your classmates or distract them from their training. You can socialize before or after class, quietly, but class time is for training.

If you are given a water break, be mindful of any other classes training on the other side of the dojang. Go around the edge of the mat instead of interrupting another class by running through.

If you are not participating in class, do not disrupt it by talking loudly, running through the dojang, or playing near the mat. This might distract those who are training. Adults, turn off the ringer on your cell phone and take any phone conversations outside so they do not disrupt class.

Do not wear any jewelry in class other than a plain wedding band. This is for your own safety as well as other students. Also, trim your fingernails

and toenails before coming to class. We will often practice grappling or sparring, and long nails can injure your partner.

- **Show respect during promotions.**

Promotions are a joyful time. Your hard work has been rewarded and you are allowed to advance to a higher rank with new material. Sometimes students are so excited that they get restless. It can be a long process, but stay attentive and show respect for those being promoted as they show respect for you.

You will line up standing and will be told to have a seat or take a knee. This should be done quickly, but in rank order. All red belts will sit first, followed by all green belts, then all orange, yellow, and white belts. Sit with your back straight and your legs crossed in front of you. Do not lie down on your back or belly. Stay seated and upright.

When you are promoted, you will be called to the front of the room. When your name is called, stand (if seated), respond loudly with “Yes, sir” or “Yes, ma’am”, bow, say “*Ko map sumnida, Tang Soo*” with spirit. Then exit the line as you would during class. Step back out of your line and run to your right behind your line before turning towards the front of the class. Stop at the senior line and bow to the most senior student, then continue to the front.

When you get up front, you will be told to remove your belt (if you are receiving a color promotion). To do so, turn away from the instructor promoting you as if you were fixing your uniform. Fold your belt in half, and then in half again, then hand it with both hands to the black belt assisting with promotions. If you are receiving a stripe instead of a new belt, when you get to the front, come to attention in front of the instructor.

After you are promoted, you should bow to the instructor promoting you, say “*Ko map sumnida, Tang Soo*” with spirit, then shake hands, again remembering to keep your left hand under your right elbow and your toes touching when you bow. Move to your left and bow and shake the hand of each black belt in line before returning to your line.

During your training, always remember, Tang Soo Do is not just about kicking and punching. It is about becoming a better person and a better member of society. The knights of medieval England were noted for their chivalry; in the same manner, etiquette is what sets us apart as martial artists. By following

these rules of etiquette, you are demonstrating your humility and respect, and becoming part of an ancient and noble tradition. Tang Soo!