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Introduction to Guidelines Manual

The purpose of this Guidelines Manual for Kyu Examinations is to provide supplementary detail and explanation to the Kyu Ranking Regulations updated on December 19, 2020, particularly in adding specificity to the expectations and key descriptors at each kyu rank.

The Kyu Ranking Regulations are the ultimate basis for grading exams. This Introduction to Guidelines Manual is a guidance document that provides examples and explanations, and is oriented toward training new examiners, instructors, and candidates. If there is any confusion or conflict, be sure to follow the information in the “USNF Standards for Kyu Examination” document.

The main objectives of this document are:

To provide easily accessible and equal knowledge to examiners: This document provides guidance for examiners, instructors, and candidates based on the wisdom and experience of the Shogo Committee and representatives from across the USNF.

To document the expertise and knowledge of past and present examiners to maintain the quality and caliber of Naginata within the USNF.

To unify examiners’ expectations and standards for kyu ranks across USNF regional federations.

To be used during kyu examiner training seminars and workshops to train existing and future examiners to uphold unified expectations and values: This document is intended to be implemented as an active training manual for examiners.

To be shared, at instructor’s discretion, with students in preparation for upcoming exams: Clear, consistent expectations will help practitioners assess their own skill level and understand their own progress towards goals prior to taking exams.

General Considerations

In addition to the main objectives listed above, examiners, instructors, and candidates should keep in mind the following when accessing the information in this document:

- The Kyu Ranking Regulation (updated 12/19/2020) outlines the specific requirements for the content of kyu exams, as well as the minimum required waiting period between exams. The “Overall Level of Experience” categories included in this document are provided as examples to provide guidance and context.
- It should be noted that young children should be encouraged to test less frequently than adults to promote their mental and physical development before taking the next exam. The length of recommended waiting periods for children will depend on various factors, including the child’s age, skill, and frequency of practice.
- The Kyu Ranking Regulation does not list minimum age requirements. In the USNF, the minimum age for achieving Shodan is 13 years. The “Minimum Recommended Age of Candidates” section in this document is intended to provide guidance and context to instructors of very young children. It is implicitly understood that anyone older is also eligible for any of these ranks.

6-kyu

Minimum Recommended Age	- Children (under 13)
Overall Level of Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Individuals who have started martial arts for the first time and have been practicing for < 6 months - Individuals who demonstrate elementary familiarity with using the weapon - Individuals with poor motor coordination as compared to the average candidate their age
Key Areas of Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accurate recall of required techniques - Joge-buri - Candidate is able to continue with exam even after making a mistake
Reigi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Candidate performs appropriate technique in response to Japanese vocal command - Performs bow (rei) at correct time when prompted - If worn, uniform is clean, neat, and worn correctly <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Keikogi covers chest and thighs in side gap in hakama - Hakama is approximately ankle-length
Form and Posture	- Candidate safely handles the naginata with elementary control
Accuracy	- Habu sometimes reaches the target
Consistency	Not evaluated
Smoothness	Not evaluated

Weight of Exam Sections:

Joge-buri	Datotsu	
50%	Shomen-uchi	Men-uke
	40%	10%

- The 6-kyu exam includes joge-buri and datotsu (shomen-uchi and men-uke). These two sections should be weighted equally in judging a candidate's level.

Other Notes:

- Keikogi and hakama not required for those testing for the first time
- The term "poor motor coordination" is not judgmental

5-kyu

Minimum Recommended Age	- Children (under 13)
Overall Level of Experience	- Those who have started martial arts for the first time and have been practicing for less than 6 months - Those who just started naginata at a seminar
Key Areas of Evaluation	- Chudan no kamae - Ayumi ashi - Joge-buri - Candidate is able to continue with exam even after making a mistake
Reigi	- Performs bow (rei) at correct time when prompted - If worn, uniform is clean, neat, and worn correctly <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Keikogi covers chest and thighs in side gap in hakama - Hakama is approximately ankle-length
Form and Posture	- Beginning and ending postures can be recognized - Inconsistently moves front hand during shomen and joge-buri - Candidate shows elementary level of correct te no nigiri (grip) and hand positions
Accuracy	- Habu sometimes reaches the target
Consistency	Low priority
Smoothness	Not evaluated

Weight of Exam Sections:

Joge-buri	Datotsu	Shikake-Oji
33.3%	33.3%	33.3%

- The 5-kyu exam includes joge-buri, datotsu, and shikake-oji. These three sections should be weighted equally in judging a candidate's level.

Other Notes:

- Keikogi and hakama not required for those testing for the first time

4-kyu

Minimum Recommended Age	- Children (under 13)
Overall Level of Experience	- Those who have started martial arts for the first time and have been practicing for less than 6 months
Key Areas of Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chudan no kamae - Hasso no kamae - Okuri ashi - Ayumi ashi - Jogeburi - Hand position (see Form and Posture below) - Body control
Reigi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Performs bow (rei) at correct time when prompted - If worn, uniform is clean, neat, and worn correctly <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Keikogi covers chest and thighs in side gap in hakama - Hakama is approximately ankle-length
Form and Posture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hanmi, hand positions, and foot positions recognizable in starting and ending stances - Candidate attempts to use the back hand (jikute) when striking - Large kissaki motion
Accuracy	- Habu generally reaches the target
Consistency	- Kamae and ending positions show introductory consistency, demonstrating the number of repetitions the candidate has practiced
Smoothness	Low priority

Weight of Exam Sections:

Jogeburi	Datotsu	Uchikaeshi	Shikake-Oji
25%	25%	25%	25%

- The 4-kyu exam includes jogeburi, datotsu, uchikaeshi, and shikake-oji. These four sections should be weighted equally in judging a candidate's level.

3-kyu

Minimum Recommended Age	- Candidates 14 years old or older who have been practicing naginata 9 months or more
Overall Level of Experience	- 9 months or more of consistent naginata training - At least 3 months of training after receiving 4-kyu
Key Areas of Evaluation	- Timing of receives (uke) matches the timing of strikes - Demonstrates elementary control of maai - Hand placements (te no ichi) - Elementary display of ki ken tai icchi: move body and weapon together inconsistently - Body control
Reigi	- Performs bow (rei) at correct time when prompted - Uniform is clean, neat, and worn correctly <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Keikogi covers chest and thighs in side gap in hakama - Hakama is approximately ankle-length
Form and Posture	- Chudan no kamae, hasso no kamae, hanmi, hand, and foot positions are generally correct - Use of hand sliding (te no kayoi) is evident, even if ishizuki length is variable and inaccurate - Mochikae in furikaeshi is generally centered overhead
Accuracy	- Monouchi usually reaches the target - When pairs come to uchi-uke position, naginata usually cross at monouchi
Consistency	- Elementary consistency in movements and striking - Ishizuki length, kissaki height, and hand placement in chudan no kamae is consistent
Smoothness	- Jogeburi has an even cadence: upswing and downswing have approximately equal timing

Weight of Exam Sections:

Jogeburi	Datotsu	Uchikaeshi	Shikake-Oji
25%	25%	25%	25%

- The 3-kyu exam includes jogeburi, datotsu, uchikaeshi, and shikake-oji. These four sections should be weighted equally in judging a candidate's level.

2-kyu

Minimum Recommended Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Candidates 14 years old or older who have been practicing naginata for 12 months or more
Overall Level of Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 12 months or more of consistent naginata training - At least 4 months of training after receiving 3-kyu
Key Areas of Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Body movement (tai sabaki) and hand placements (te no ichi) on the receive (uke) side - Body control
Reigi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consistent good posture and good form for rei - Exhibits good posture even when not active - Uniform is clean, neat, and worn correctly <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Keikogi covers chest and thighs in side gap in hakama - Hakama is approximately ankle-length
Form and Posture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Wakigamae: hand placement (te no ichi), hasuji being parallel to the floor, kissaki in the correct direction - Do uchi: hand placement (te no ichi), hasuji being parallel to the floor, kissaki in the correct direction - Hamni, hand, and foot positions correct in beginnings and endings of movements - Hasuji and grip (te no nigiri) are generally correct in beginnings and endings of movements - Mochikae in furikaeshi is centered overhead - Upper body generally relaxed
Accuracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Monouchi usually reaches the target - When pairs come to uchi-uke position, naginata usually cross at monouchi
Consistency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Elementary consistency in movements, striking, and distance - Elementary consistency in overall form - Elementary consistency of ki ken tai icchi
Smoothness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Joge-buri and uchikaeshi are performed with elementary grace - Strikes have an even cadence, without excessive pause in intermediate kamae, such as furiage or hasso - Furikaeshi has even kissaki speed - Movements should not appear rushed

Weight of Exam Sections:

Jogeburi	Datotsu	Uchikaeshi	Shikake-Oji
25%	25%	25%	25%

- The 2-kyu exam includes jogeburi, datotsu, uchikaeshi, and shikake-oji. These four sections should be weighted equally in judging a candidate's level.

1-kyu

Minimum Recommended Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Candidates 14 years old or older who have been practicing naginata for 15 months or more
Overall Level of Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 15 months or more of consistent naginata training - At least 6 months of training after receiving 2-kyu
Key Areas of Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Correct posture and hand placement for shizentai - Furi (swings) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Candidate shows correct hanmi and accurate hasuji - Exhibits good ki ken tai icchi during furiage strikes and jogeburi in particular - Introductory level of fighting spirit, as shown through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Confidence in movements - Poise, posture - Decisive kiai - Commitment to strikes - Taking chudan no kamae (introductory seme) - Uchikaeshi and shikake-oji: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hand placement (te no ichi) during strikes and kamae - Kamae form - Hanmi - Striking the correct targets - Tai sabaki and hand placement on the receive (uke) side <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Harai is executed with proper hand sliding (te no kayoi), tai sabaki, ki ken tai ichi, and posture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Maintains adequate distance between hands (te haba) - Uses relaxed/soft front hand - Maintains balanced body weight and form when stepping back - Maintains accurate hasso no kamae - Strikes show confidence and intention (introductory seme) - Usually maintains correct maai - Candidate consistently transfers key skills into bogu - Body control
Reigi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consistent good posture and good form for rei in and out of bogu - Exhibits good posture even when not active in and out of bogu - Uniform is clean, neat, and worn correctly <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Keikogi covers chest and thighs in side gap in hakama - Hakama is approximately ankle-length - Bogu is worn safely and appropriately (stays on during exam)
Form and Posture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Shows good footwork (tai sabaki), body position (hip angle, back straight), and hand placement (te no ichi) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Steps are proportionate to candidate's height

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Steps are generally about candidate's shoulder width - Candidate maintains smooth movement of the center of gravity and equilibrium while stepping - Hand sliding (te no kayoi) is used correctly, with ishizuki at accurate length - Blade angle (hasuji) matches the direction of the cut - Upper body generally relaxed - Demonstrates moderate proficiency in correct hand grip (te no uchi) and power hand vs. soft hand - Maintains balance and posture during movement, kamae transitions, strike positions in and out of bogu - Maintains body control during kamae transitions (no extra body movements or leaning)
Accuracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Monouchi consistently reaches the target - May exhibit greater inaccuracy in bogu
Consistency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Overall consistency in movements, striking, and distance - Overall consistency in kamae, ishizuki length, and strikes - Level of consistency shows the number of repetitions the candidate has practiced
Smoothness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Joge-buri, uchikaeshi, and shikake-oji are performed with overall grace and demonstrates elementary level of spirit - Kamae to strike transitions may be slow, but are smooth <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No excessive pauses in kamae while striking - Center of gravity stays level when moving - Takes chudan no kamae smoothly from shizentai - Shows elementary maturity in kamae to strike transitions

Weight of Exam Sections:

Joge-buri	Datotsu	Uchikaeshi	Shikake-Oji	Bogu
10%	20%	20%	40%	10%

- The 1-kyu exam includes five sections: joge-buri, datotsu, uchikaeshi, shikake-oji, and bogu. Of the five sections, joge-buri, datotsu, and uchikaeshi have roughly equal weight. Shikake-oji is weighted most heavily of the sections. Bogu is weighted less heavily; however, a candidate may fail an exam if they are unsafe in bogu.

Scoring System

The primary objective for shinsa is to help promote naginata by motivating and “bringing up” the candidates.

Scoresheets:

Scoresheets are provided to the examiners as a memory and discussion aid, but are not part of the official exam record. Each examiner has their own method of marking the scoresheet, though common practice among senior examiners is outlined below:

- In the waza columns under Basic, Shikake-Oji, and Bogu, an ‘O’ marks acceptable performance while an ‘X’ marks unacceptable performance. Some examiners use a ‘Δ’ to mark marginal performance.
- Examiners may use other notations, such as a larger or smaller size O/X or +/-, for more detail.
- Many examiners write additional notes as a memory aid for giving feedback to the candidate.
- The ‘Result’ column is submitted to the Chief Examiner and is considered a part of the exam record. For evenness of judging candidates, it is expected that the pass/fail result should be consistent with the X and O marks in the waza columns. In other words, it does not make sense to pass a candidate with many X’s while failing a different candidate with few X’s.
- Keep in mind the weight of exam sections for each level: an X in a highly-weighted area should be taken seriously.

Sample Scoresheet:



UNITED STATES NAGINATA FEDERATION, INC.

Kyu Promotional Exam

Date: 10/5/2019

Examiner: Donald Duck

Tally the number of X's and O's in-between the purple lines here to determine a pass

No.	Kyu			Name	Basic			Shikake-Oji	Bogu		Result
	Requested	Current	Date Current Rank Awarded		Jogei-buri	Datotsu	Uchikaeshi	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	Uchikaeshi	Kakari/Gokaku Geiko	
1	4	N/A		Daffy Duck	O	X	X	X			5
2	2	3	5/4/19	Spongebob Squarepants	X	O	O	X			2
3	1	2	3/7/19	Usagi Tsukino	O	O	O	O	O	O	1

In this example, Daffy Duck failed three of the four sections, and is recommended for 5-kyu (fail). Spongebob Squarepants failed two of the four sections, and is recommended for 2-kyu (pass), but marked with a triangle for further discussion as a marginal candidate. Usagi Tsukino passed all sections and is recommended for 1-kyu (pass).

Evaluation:

After the exam, the examiners meet to determine the examination board recommendations for each candidate. Each examiner gives their results to the Chief Examiner.

- The Chief Examiner tallies up all of the 'Final Results' and reads out loud the number of passes and fails each candidate received. Results are recorded in the final examination form.
- After reading all of the results, the Chief Examiner may ask the panel if they would like to discuss any particular candidate.
 - Upon discussion, a final result may change, and therefore have a different recording of the 'result' rank submitted to the USNF.
- If the examiners disagree on a particular candidate, they will discuss this candidate in more detail. If the examiners cannot come to a consensus recommendation, the Chief Examiner makes the final call.
- The Chief Examiner records the recommendations in the exam record.

Other notes for consideration:

- The group of candidates is not graded on a curve. Each candidate needs to be evaluated individually against the standards written on the "USNF Standards for Kyu Examinations" document, rather than compared to other candidates in the group.
- A borderline candidate is one whom the examiner is not sure whether to pass or fail; it is helpful to mark this on the scoresheet. This uncertainty is an indication that the examiner should be more willing to agree with other examiners' assessments.
- It is important for examiners to reflect on their own experiences and the feelings they had when taking a kyu exam at the beginning of their own naginata journey.

Special Circumstances:

There may be candidates who have special needs or conditions that require special dispensation and attention. Examples of special needs or conditions to consider include recent injuries or long-term intellectual or physical disabilities. The candidates' instructor is expected to approach the Chief Examiner ahead of the exam and advise them of the special needs. The Chief Examiner will give the appropriate information to the examination board.

- The examination board should make an effort to accommodate special needs and conditions.
- The accommodations should be *specific* to the particulars of the condition.
- The examination board should be careful not to violate the privacy of the candidate and only divulge what information is necessary to make the accommodation and proper evaluation.
- Accommodation should not be mixed up with "standards."
 - "Accommodation" means possible modification of the **test/shinsa structure** as a way to help candidates demonstrate their best ability to meet the grading criteria.
 - "Standard" is the **criteria used to measure quality** in an evaluation (Kyu Ranking Regulation document).
- Although the test format may be modified, you still must evaluate the candidate using the same kyu shinsa requirements criteria administered by the USNF.

Examples of accommodations are:

- A 9-year-old child diagnosed with ADHD, dyslexia, and anxiety, registered to test for 6-kyu, may be administered the datotsu portion only of the *5-kyu exam* so that they can test with their same-aged peers in a more familiar setting. They may also have an adult “shadow” next to them as a way to make the test setting more comfortable and prevent the chances of an anxiety attack.
- A 11-year-old candidate diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder and having sensory issues, making a regular shinsa environment with a lot of people, noises, uncomfortable temperatures, would be evaluated in a separate and isolated room, or put up a curtain with no one else in the same space.
- A candidate who is deaf in one ear may request an accommodation during a shinsa to be placed so their "good" ear is facing the shidosha, even if this is not the "correct" placement they would be in based on the order of their name on the examination paperwork
- A candidate who is completely deaf may request an accommodation of having their ASL interpreter be allowed to move around the dojo to stay in the candidates' line of sight. The candidate would not be penalized for their gaze leaving their partner when looking to their interpreter for instructions
- A candidate with ADHD, especially a younger child, may request an accommodation for frequent verbal reminders of what the expectation is (remember to stay in shizentai, remember to focus on the shidosha). A candidate with ADHD may be allowed to take more frequent breaks, or to step out of the dojo when it is not their turn, and be called back when they need to return
- A candidate with significantly delayed processing time ("think time") or someone who does not speak either English or Japanese as a first language may request an accommodation that the shidosha pause between giving instructions and saying "hajime"
- A candidate with severe social anxiety may request an accommodation of testing "with a friend", even if this means they are testing with someone challenging a different kyu rank
- A candidate who is elderly, or has certain physical challenges, or candidates who have a long-term illness, and do not have the physical strength to reach the initial target for Shikake-Oji #3, 4, or 5 may request an accommodation of being partnered with a partner of the same age group, even if that partner is not testing, or a more experienced partner who can adjust the ma-ai accordingly

Skipping of Ranks

Although the lowest rank in the USNF is the rank of 6-kyu, it is common for first-time candidates to test for 5-kyu or 4-kyu. The candidate's instructor will make the rank recommendation for testing on the candidate's application. The instructor will use their best judgment to make the most appropriate first rank recommendation.

In general, first-time candidates are eligible to test for 6-kyu, 5-kyu, or 4-kyu. In special circumstances, a first-time candidate's instructor may request that the candidate be allowed to test for a higher kyu rank. In these instances, the President of the candidate's regional federation must submit a written request to the Technical Committee at least two weeks prior to the exam date with an explanation of the extenuating circumstances warranting the request. The Technical Committee is responsible for determining whether to approve or deny any such requests.

Although "special circumstances" are not specifically defined, examples might include:

- A candidate who, due to financial or geographical reasons, has been unable to test previously while training for an extended period of time
- A candidate who has trained in another country where exams were not administered or accessible and recently joined the USNF

After a candidate successfully reaches 4-kyu, mandatory waiting periods are established in the Kyu Ranking Regulation. Candidates may not test more frequently than the minimum waiting periods and may not skip ranks after reaching 4-kyu, unless special circumstances warrant an exception and a written request is submitted, as noted above.

Guidance to Examiners on Giving Feedback

This section is intended to provide guidance to examiners on giving effective feedback to candidates after an exam, whether successful or not.

- Please provide level-appropriate feedback to candidates in the areas noted in Kyu Ranking Regulations and/or categories noted in this Guidelines Manual.
- Please try to limit your feedback to 3-5 different points.
- Please provide positive productive feedback: name a specific aspect or characteristic of the candidate's performance that was particularly good.
- Consider using the "sandwich method": begin and end feedback to a candidate with specific positive feedback, "sandwiching" a corrective feedback comment in the middle.
- Consider providing feedback comments to the candidates' main instructors as follow-up to exams. This way instructors can provide guidance and support to their students to implement the feedback the candidates received from each examiner.