



**GKR**  
KARATE



## **SECTION 3:** **Instruction guide to teaching kata, kumite and combinations**

- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Teaching combinations
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- 3.4 Teaching kumite



## 3.1 Introduction

There is around 15 minutes in each class where the instructor can cover whatever they choose with the students.

This may include:

- Combinations
- Line drills
- One step sparring
- Self defence

The final part of every class is covering:

- Kata
- Kumite

This section is designed to include helpful hints and notes on the instruction of combinations, kata and kumite. You will notice we don't include combinations in this section. It does, however, serve as a guide to teaching combinations, kata and kumite in a class environment.

## 3.2 Teaching Combinations

### Combination 'Hints'

- Don't complicate the combination, especially for lower grades. The less they need to remember and concentrate on the pattern, the more they can focus on their technique. For example, have one technique per step. (eg. move through in forward stance with front punch, then step back into front stance with head level block.)
- Don't over-complicate combinations for higher grades. Just because they are higher grades, you don't have to prove a point by putting together 'killer combinations' that even you cannot remember! There is nothing worse than when an instructor gets lost in his or her own combination.
- When explaining the combination to the class, it's much easier to show them how it works when you face the same way as the students. Facing the class gives them a mirror image of what you are wanting them

to do, which will make it harder for them to understand it.

- Explain the combination one move at a time and have them do it with you until they are confident with it, as opposed to showing them the full combination and then expecting them to do it to their own timing on your count.
- Do not neglect all techniques and stances. There are literally hundreds of different combinations that can be put together. Don't focus on the same 5 techniques and the same 2 stances.

### Combination 'Pitfalls'

#### Pitfall 1...

#### The instructor gets more caught up in tiring the class out

Where it is good to push your students, if it becomes your number one focus your students will be fit, but lack the technical ability necessary to grade. Often when they are tired they will develop bad habits such as high stances, sloppy technique and a lack of focus and precision. In many cases, you can see students taking these short cuts just to keep up with the class (or your count). This inevitably will see them go backwards in standard.

*"Remember, karate is not aerobics"*

#### Pitfall 2...

The instructor attempts to keep the students interested by doing many different combinations. Variety is important. But if it becomes a major focus the students may not be getting the





repetition they require to improve. Doing many combinations in the 15 minutes most likely means there was less explaining and feedback on the combinations done.

### **Pitfall 3...**

#### **The instructor focuses ‘too much’ on explaining technique and the class drags on**

The key words here are ‘too much’. Technique is important, but if you spend too much time explaining the technical aspect of the combination, the class may feel like it’s dragging on. Use enough explanation to get the full point across, and then get the class working on the combination. Repetition is the mother of skill.

**Hint:** *Find a good balance between technique and exercise. Motivate them to do it right! They should know what to focus on for each part and aim to do it with precise technique. Give your students feedback and praise at every opportunity. As they put the combination together, your praise and positive feedback will boost their confidence level which will improve their ability to perform it with greater focus and intensity.*

## **3.3 Teaching Kata**

### **Key points for developing good kata in your students**

We have all heard the saying that practice makes perfect. This statement however could not be further from the truth. If you are doing something slightly wrong and keep practising then you’re only going to get better at doing it wrong. The reality

is that practice doesn’t make perfect...“practice makes permanent”. This is because habits are formed in practice. It is often students’ habits - the way they do their kata, or certain techniques in the kata that lets them down.

**Q:** *Have you ever had a student that continually forgets to bring their foot back to the knee after the side kick in Bassai-dai? Even after you have been telling them for weeks? Or months?*

**Q:** *Have you ever had students doing second kata where they have their returning arm move about while kicking instead of keeping their upper body perfectly still? And these students do this for months?*

The truth is that practice doesn’t make perfect, but “perfect practice makes perfect”. When you teach students how to practise the right way they will be able to eliminate their bad habits quickly and start to move forwards again!

### **Tips for improving kata**

#### **Let your students know what you want**

You can’t just count through the moves and expect people to improve. Before going through the kata, tell them what you want them to focus on. By doing this not only will they perform better, but the more they hear you explaining it the easier it becomes for them to focus on it. They learn to become ‘self corrective’. It’s like having a mental picture of what it should look like, then focusing on getting their body to do it right.

#### **Repeat each move (or sequence)**

Sometimes you need to have the students go back and do it again. When doing this, give them feedback on what they did, and how you want them to do it next time. This is especially useful when they use incorrect timing or use poor focus. You may also want to explain a technical aspect of the kata (eg. more hips, better angle, returning hand etc).

By repeating each section of the kata several times, you are honing in on one section and focusing 100% on that section only. This can make a big difference to the individual’s kata. The student gets in depth training specific to that particular section.

#### **Be clear on the details**

Sometimes in a grading or seminar a student may be corrected, to which they remark, “I never knew that”. If a student doesn’t have clear knowledge of each technique in their kata, they will find it very



difficult to develop it. There are certain principles that must be repeated over and over again, class after class. Keep a close eye on every student's technique, and correct them at every opportunity. If the instructor allows improper technique to form into a habit, then the students' karate ability will be very limited.

**The most common errors students will make during kata (and basics for that matter) are:**

1. Stances will be too wide, or too short.
2. Foot positioning will be incorrect. Check the angles.
3. Hips will not be in the correct position. This too may be caused by having stances that may be too long or too wide.
4. Body posture will be tilted forward. Teach them to keep their back straight. This needs to be done by tightening their lower abdomen and pushing forward on the hips while maintaining correct posture.
5. The body must remain at the same height at all times, especially whilst moving from one move into another.

**Set goals and homework assignments**

A great way to have students improve their kata is to select a section that you've been working on and ask them to practise it at home during the week. You may tell them that you'll be going over that section again in the following class, and you will check on their progress. When a student has a deadline to follow they are more likely to focus more, try harder and practise at home (see Section 5 on setting goals with students).

**Teach them the difference between hard and soft (the Ying or 'Ju', and Yang or 'Go' of kata)**

Many students rush kata when it is to their own timing. Teach them the fundamentals of hard and soft, and how this creates the timing aspect of the kata. Some people spend a lot of time trying to make their kata look solid and strong, but they don't pay enough attention to the slower, more fluent techniques. By focusing only on the 'hard and fast' techniques, and ignoring the slower/softer aspects, the whole kata will look weak.

*"Good Kata has good balance between fast and slow, hard and soft".*

- If a part of the kata should be fast, it should be explosive!
- If a part of the kata should be slow, it should be flowing, but not weak!

It can be best described like this. When you see someone with incredible kata prowess perform, the fast, snappy techniques should make you think "I would hate to be on the end of that!" Likewise, when they are performing the slow, strong techniques you should be saying to yourself "That is so strong, you could never get through it!"

**Tips on performing 'hard & fast' techniques:**

1. Start from a relaxed position – don't move while your body is in tension.
2. Your whole body must 'snap' into position, making your hips the centre of the focus.
3. Every part of your body must be involved in the technique – from the stance, to the mid-torso and finally the arms. If you are moving out to punch, the whole body makes up the punch, not just the arm and fist.
4. Your timing must be 'spot on'. If the timing of the upper and lower body is out of whack, you will not be able to give the technique 100% focus. Without this focus, you won't be able to generate full power and 'explosiveness'.
5. Your aim as you move through a technique is to be so fast it would beat any defence; yet so powerful people would think, "I would hate to be hit by it!"

**Tips on performing 'slow & soft' techniques:**

1. Although the move may look slow, it must have 'power' running through it.
2. Don't be relaxed (eg. loose/weak) as you move through a technique. Even though it is a 'soft' movement, it doesn't mean it carries no strength.
3. Keep the technique flowing, not rigid.
4. Timing and balance are critical. They make the move 'stand out', and compliment the explosive technique that is about to follow.

5. Your aim when moving into a slow technique is to be graceful, yet so strong and powerful in stance that people would say, "I couldn't see myself moving them out of that position".

The idea now is to put these techniques together without compromising each other. What this means, is that when moving through from fast to soft (or vice versa), you need to adapt immediately to the new pace: you are moving from one contrast to another.

### 3.4 Teaching Kumite

Important guidelines for dojo kumite:

- Kumite must always be supervised.
- All students sparring should be wearing protective gear.
- All students sparring must hold a minimum of 8<sup>th</sup> kyu grade.
- All students must be aware of the correct etiquette when sparring.
- Students who are over aggressive in sparring, or make continual contact must not continue to participate in the kumite session. If there is any danger present, it is your responsibility to make the decision to remove it. Our motto in this situation is 'prevention is better than cure'. You should speak to any such student about the etiquette and rules of the dojo.
- Students should always spar with a good attitude towards their opponent. There can never be any aggression between students while sparring.
- Students must go at the pace set out by the instructor. In free sparring the higher grade sets the pace.

#### 'Illegal'/restricted sparring techniques

The following techniques are totally barred (illegal) in GKR. They must never be used during kumite.

- Spinning back fist strike
- Open hand strike to face or throat

- Sweeping the supporting leg (after catching a kick)
- Holding/pulling onto a caught kick

The following techniques are restricted to students who hold a minimum of Brown Belt (3rd Kyu):

- Hook kicks
- Spinning back kicks
- Spinning hook kicks
- Sweeping of any kind
- Open hand techniques

#### Important points for developing good kumite in your students:

- Just like basics, practise kumite at slow and medium pace before fast. This allows your students to work on their technique while warming up their body.
- Aim to develop your students in all areas of kumite eg. attack using both sides of the body, counter attack, defence etc.
- Be aware of the many exercises to develop kumite. As opposed to just 'free' sparring.
- Talk to students about kumite. eg. What makes good kumite, what to think during kumite, tactics etc. Kumite training is both physical and theory. To teach kumite is more than merely 'doing' kumite. Teach your students about correct stance, guard and breathing action

#### Types of Kumite to do in class

##### 1. Jyu Kumite (Free sparring)

Free sparring is the best way to develop a 'real to life' self-defence ability. It allows both students to flow in their technique and spar 'as if' it were a real situation. However, in the dojo they use correct technique and practise total control. The first round should begin at 25% focus to allow students to get their 'eye' in and mind ready for free sparring. The second round may be 50% focus and then build it up.

## 2. Ippon Kumite (Point sparring)

Point sparring should be done in class from time to time to help develop and prepare students for tournaments. It also develops speed and a competitive edge. Considering karate was originally designed to fend off an attacker with one technique, point sparring also has a sense of realism as it trains students to get in fast with one strong attack.

### Exercises to develop Kumite

#### 1. Numbers kumite

The aim is to first score on your partner with one attack. Once you have scored with one you move to two, meaning you must now attack with a combination of two attacks, no more no less and at least one technique must score. When you have been successful with this you move onto a combination of three, and so on until you get to 5.

**Note:** *The idea behind this is to train students to attack in single and combination attacks.*

#### 2. Limiting Kumite

This is where the instructor may limit students to certain attacks, or even limbs (of the body) that they may use. For example you may limit students to:

- The students can only use the left side of the body for any attacks (or vice versa).
- The students can only spar with their left foot forward (or vice versa).
- One side can only use legs for attacking,



while the other side can only use arms for attacking.

- One side is the attacking side, while their partner is only allowed to defend.

**Note:** *The idea behind this is that many students only practise what they feel they are good at. Therefore they never develop well-rounded kumite. By limiting people, it gives them no option but to practise using certain techniques.*

#### 3. Technique kumite

This is where you may have students working on point kumite. The object is to give them some different techniques that they must score with before they can move on to the next. eg. The instructor might say '1<sup>st</sup> Kazama tsuki (jab). Once you have scored with one of these you can move onto.. 2<sup>nd</sup> Gyaka tsuki (reverse punch) with the right hand. Once a successful score is made with this you must move onto 3<sup>rd</sup>- Front kick, then 4<sup>th</sup> Counter attack with reverse punch etc.

**Note:** *The aim again with this is to have students working on all areas of their kumite instead of always doing what they are good at. "Aim to develop your weaknesses and build on your strengths."*

#### 4. Feedback kumite

This exercise is done during free sparring. After a round of sparring, give the students 30 seconds to give each other feedback on how they felt their partner did. They should talk about what they thought were the persons strengths, and also their weaknesses.

**Note:** *This shouldn't be done too often, even though it can be very valuable. They are not getting feedback from an instructor, but from their peers. Often a student thinks they have a certain technique is their strength, but finds a few people say "you do it so often I know its coming". This teaches them to minimise how frequently it is used. On the flip side, they may be told that they are very good at a technique that they had previously had little confidence in.*

#### 5. "Bullet in a gun" kumite

This is a great exercise to develop point style kumite. You have the class stand in lines with one person out in front facing the group. The first person in line must make a single attack. The idea is to score with 1 technique, (hence the title). The student out in front aims to block the technique.

When everyone in the line has gone through, the student out the front changes place with the next student in line, and so on.

You can vary this exercise by allowing the student out in front to block and then follow up with a counter technique. You can also alternate the attacks. For example, each time a new student is about to attack the one out in front, they each have a go at attacking, and countering.

*The idea behind this is that it gears students up for point sparring by providing an environment that calls for total focus on only 1 technique.*

## Some psychology behind kumite

***Good kumite is as much 'mental ability' as it is 'physical ability'***

Some students can be limited in their sparring ability. eg. if a student's strength lies in a particular punch or kick combination, what happens when they come up against a person who has a great counter for that combination? What happens when a fast person meets someone faster? What happens when a strong person who always uses their strength to their advantage, meets one who is stronger? What happens when a kicker comes up against a person who loves to counter kicks?

Being a great martial artist (purely from a kumite point of view) is about having strengths in all areas – both attack and defence.

## Developing good kumite practice

### Form (Stance and guard)

#### Good stance consists of...

- Your stance should be 1 to 1 and a half shoulder widths long, and 1 shoulder width wide.
- Your weight should be evenly distributed and you need to be light on your feet. Your back heel should be off the ground, both knees slightly bent.
- Your hips should be on a 45-degree angle. This makes you a smaller target

and provides more power to the reverse punches and kicks. Your back should be straight.

- The front hand of the guard should be out in front, fist about chin height (to protect your head). The back hand should be situated in front of your mid-section, ready to be able to block any attacks to that part of your body, and even able to defend groin level if needed. Neither hand should be close to the body, as blocking time is greatly diminished.
- Lower grades should always have closed hands. Higher grades may open hands if they feel more comfortable and are more experienced.
- The hands should be covering the centre line of the body (this is where the most vulnerable parts of the body are).

## Attacking

A good karate-ka should have a vast range of attacks. They should master the basics behind the attack, which include timing and distance.

### Good attacking consists of...

- An ability to attack from both sides of the body. Many students can only spar effectively if they have their right leg back. This eliminates their ability to vary their kumite.
- Having the ability to have correct distance and execute an attack with precise timing and focus. Many people start their attacks too far away and fall short. Others move in way too close first and are picked off.
- There should be minimal 'telegraphing'. A lot of students have habits they do before attacking.
- Speed is important and can be developed through practise and focus.
- Speed between techniques in combination attacks is developed with practise.
- It is good to have around 5 or more combinations you are quite skilful at, that you can use at any time.

- Kicking is important. Even if a student feels they lack good kicks, by using them, it gives their opponent more to focus on than just looking at their hands. A kick doesn't have to score to be effective. It could be a way of opening up the opponents defence, allowing the attacker the opportunity to follow through with more techniques.

*The more attacks you develop into strengths, the more your opponent has to watch out for. It therefore increases your confidence. It also means you are more adaptable in your kumite. The objective is to develop all areas of your kumite, from differing attacks, to staying focussed and aware of your opponent's every move.*

## Defending

Defence isn't just about blocking, but also what happens after you have blocked a technique. It involves putting yourself in a position to be able to execute an effective block, and counter with an effective counter attack. Your stance, posture and ability to move from one technique to the next are all integral to the art of self defence.

### Good defence consists of ...

- Being able to defend while having either the right or left legs back in stance. Some people like to attack with a certain leg forward and with certain attacks. You can make it harder for them straight away by changing legs. For example if a person spars with their left leg forward and likes to lunge punch, they will have a more closed off target if you spar with the right leg forward.
- Being able to block using either arm.
- Having the ability to block and counter immediately.
- Picking people off with techniques such as reverse punch, lunge punch or front foot kicks.
- Moving on angles (Taitze baki). When someone is much bigger, standing toe to toe can leave you with no chance of victory. Sometimes, moving around disrupts their straight line attack and allows you to better pick your counter attack.

***“Wind can push grass around, yet cannot move the oak tree which stands strong. Yet the strongest wind can uproot the oak tree, but can never uproot grass which sways side to side in its wake.”***

Sometimes it's good to be the oak tree, other times its better to be the grass.

## Patience

Patience is very important when sparring. When you are constantly moving around, your opponent often becomes impatient and makes a poorly timed or executed attack. Another thing that can happen is their mind starts to wander and their hands drop slightly leaving an opportunity for you to make a well timed attack.

In defence, you should be mentally prepared for your counter, and physically in position to execute it. If you are not and your opponent attacks, it is best to move away quickly and get yourself refocused.

## Faking

Faking (or 'balking with a sense of realism') keeps your opponent on edge. Faking will bring out what a person will do if you attack. For example, if you fake a kick and they drop their hands, it tells you that this is more than likely the reaction or behaviour that they will do if a kick is really thrown. Perhaps your tactic now should be to fake a kick again, but then lunge in quickly with a punch instead.

Your goal in sparring is to have your opponent thinking about what you are doing, or what you may be going to do. If their mind is on you, then it cannot be 100% on themselves.

Faking an attack disrupts your opponent's thought pattern and allows you to continue with planning your own attacks.

## Self talk

A major aspect of kumite is confidence. If you talk yourself down before or during kumite you will begin to lose confidence in yourself. When your confidence is low, it will affect your ability.



Your posture, stance and guard look weak, tired and vulnerable. Self talk and self belief is a very important part of kumite. You need a healthy self-image, and keeping yourself focused and confident will improve your sparring ability.

The key is to teach your students to coach themselves. It is important they understand the psychology of 'self talk', for if they use this tool effectively they will notice great improvements in all aspects of their karate.

*Too often in sparring people get in a rut and keep doing the same things that aren't working. Adaptability and confidence are two major keys to good kumite and correct self talk will help to develop these.*

Replace these words with the following for effective positive self-talk, such as:

I can't do this → I can learn this

I'm not good at this → I'm going to get better

I don't like kumite → I'm going to practise and develop my skills

***"If you say you can't, you won't. If you say you can, you are half way there."***

## **Karate spirit**

Kancho often talks about kime and 'zanchin' (strong and focused). When sparring, one should never have a "I'm beaten" attitude. Never go in halfhearted. Always stand strong because it develops your strength of character.

Karate spirit is also about integrity, loyalty, honesty and respect. This is especially true in the dojo. As the instructor, your role includes teaching your students about proper etiquette, and that includes karate spirit. Karate spirit is about always doing the right thing. If someone is showing ego in the dojo, it doesn't mean you bring your ego out. Use your skill and understanding of karate spirit to get the situation under control, by explaining dojo etiquette and showing your students how karate teaches etiquette, self-control and respect.



A student with a strong stance should look confident and in control.

***"Anyone can hold the helm when the sea is calm."***

The measure of a good sea captain is how they weather the storms. The same is true in martial arts. Anyone can have a good attitude when things are going well for them, but when they are outclassed in kumite, or receive an unfair decision, or are contacted on by lower grades, or held back from a grading etc, this is when our true character shows.

***"Character is not made of sunshine and roses. Like the sword it is forged between the hammer and the anvil under intense heat and stress".***