

GKR KARATE JOURNEY

KUMITE TIPS

1. Develop Your Kaisho Kumite

As a Nidan, you are introduced to kata Shisochin, which is regarded as a kaishugata or kaishu kata, meaning open handed kata. The term kaishu (or more commonly kaisho) means open hand. To coincide with your kaishugata (Shisochin), Nidan grades are permitted to begin their kaisho kumite (open handed kumite). While many students are blocking with open hands well before Nidan, they are closing their fists to strike. Kaisho kumite allows a student to maintain open hands at all times.

Warning: *Be mindful that as a general rule open hand strikes are not permitted in kumite. This is because the padding on our hand mitts does not fully cover the blades of our hands, increasing the risk of injury. With this in mind, the development of kaisho kumite must be introduced slowly and very safely, preferably in randori kumite (medium paced, non-competitive kumite) with other high grades. If a Nidan is unable to perform kaisho kumite safely, they will be told not to use it until a later date (when the instructor feels they have developed more control and competency).*

Kaisho kumite striking techniques (such as haitos and shutos) should not be performed as they are in basics. Rather their preparation can be shortened allowing them to reach the target more quickly and adjust to various target areas. Equally, they should be constantly flowing rather than performed as powerful techniques.

The Advantages Of Kaisho Kumite Are:

Open hands allow a karate-ka to block and quickly seize the striking arm or leg. They may then use hikite (the pulling of a seized arm or leg to control or destabilise an opponent) to put themselves in a highly dominant position.

» Open hands allow for a variety of open-hand-strikes that approach an opponent from their periphery (their outside). Considering that human's develop tunnel vision when in a PSCR state (a Psycho Chemical Stress Response state associated with combat), peripheral strikes can often take an opponent by complete surprise. Additionally, open hand strikes to atemi points (anatomical weak points) in real life self-defence can incapacitate a much larger attacker.

Examples Of Kaisho Strikes In Kumite Are:

- Inside shuto counter-attack with the front hand to the face.

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- Inside shuto attack or counter-strike off either hand to the side of the head.
- Inside shuto attack to the side of the ribs.
- Outside shuto counter-strike off either hand to the side of the head.
- Pushing an opponent's guard down with the front hand and executing an outside shuto attack with the rear hand to the side of the head.
- Otoshi shuto (downward knife strike - the 'chop') to the trapezius muscle (located between the neck and shoulder).
- Haito counter-strike off either hand to the side of the head.
- Haito attack to the side of the ribs (or wrapping around to the kidneys when in close).
- Otoshi haito (downward knife strike, or 'karate chop') to the trapezius muscle (located between the neck and shoulder). This is especially effective after a lunge punch. This combination can be executed like a lunge, reverse punch combination, with the only change being the otoshi shuto replacing the gyaku tsuki.
- Combinations of kaisho attacks where the hands start to flow, often striking with one arm twice before attacking with the opposite arm.

- Combinations of attacks where you vary between peripheral open hand strikes and straight punches. This will result in your opponent's guard moving either in or out, allowing you to strike around or inside it. This is especially beneficial when conducting close quarter kumite and when developing your mushin (moving between attack and defence without thought).

Examples Of Kaisho Strikes In Real-Life Self-Defence Are:

- Inside shuto to the neck, temple, Adam's apple, nose or groin (especially when an attacker is behind you).
- Outside shuto to the neck, collarbone, temple or nose.
- Haito (ridge hand) to the temple, neck, kidneys, groin (front on) or collarbone.
- Teisho (palm strike) to the nose, chin or solar plexus.
- Nukite (finger strikes) to the eyes or throat.
- Kaisho Ura Uchi (open hand back fist). Flicking the face at close range with an open-hand back fist, allows the knuckles in your fingers to penetrate into the eyes.

Once again, be mindful that kaisho kumite must be developed with your opponent's safety in mind. If an opponent is sparring with intensity and causes you to react instinctively, refrain from kaisho waza (open hand techniques). When you are developing your kaisho kumite, only practise with opponent's who allow you to experiment safely.

2. Continue To Hone Your Hikite

We started discussing hikite during Shodan Kumite Tips. Having arrived at Nidan, it's a time to step up your focus on hikite to further enhance your skills. We say this because it's important to continue to develop yourself through each belt grade. You do not want to be the karate-ka that simply learns a new kata with each belt grade, and come kumite, just tries to do everything they have done in the past... only a little better. This is not the way to attack your journey, nor is it the way to maintain a passion for your training.

» Come time for your next grading (Sandán), there should be a vast difference in your kumite ability, strategy and techniques.

» In terms of hikite, an experienced karate-ka starts to develop their ability to block and seize most techniques. Almost every punch or kick blocked can be seized quickly with practice. Beyond this however, the real difference between basic hikite and advanced hikite is what happens in the seconds that follow.

» A basic hikite practitioner will seize and arm or leg and instinctively pull it in towards them as they execute a counter strike. And advanced practitioner has the presence of mind to establish the best way to take advantage of this situation.

Examples of these are:

1. After blocking and seizing a front kick, the advanced practitioner has the ability to quickly turn their opponent in whatever direction is required to expose their back.

2. After blocking and seizing any kick, the advanced practitioner has the ability to step in quickly and sweep the supporting leg. While this is illegal in the dojo, one can still place their foot into position without actually following through with the sweep.
3. The ability to seize both arms when an opponent rushes in with multiple attacks. Then having the presence of mind to take advantage of this in the following seconds.
 - » Blocking and seizing strikes allow you to quickly manipulate the opponent into a lock or vulnerable position.

3. Become A Wearer Of Many Hats

Numerous times throughout the kumite journey, we've alluded to the importance of developing adaptability to varying situations and styles of fighters. We have provided countless tips to help you become a highly versatile and well-rounded fighter (for both kumite and self-defence).

» While many Nidan's are adequate in varying situations or against various styles, most have their personal favourite that they have worked to instinctive competence while they dabble in the rest. The goal for any Nidan is to become highly proficient against any style of fighter, and in varying situations. For example, can you operate with extreme effectiveness when you are cornered in the dojo or where there is little room to move? What about against opponents who are larger or faster than you? Kickers? Close quarter exponents? Grabbers? Pick off experts? Constant front-footed attackers? Can you use a variety of strategies to deal with these different situations and styles? Do you have a wide arsenal of techniques?

» As a Nidan it should be apparent that you are indeed a wearer of many hats. Someone who seemingly has no style of combat of their own, rather one that they adopt according to the style of fighter they come up against.

So How Do We Develop This?

1. As With Anything, We Must Plan For It. Remember the 'P' Formula (Prior Planning Prevents Poor Performance). Print out the Kumite Tips pdf from each belt grade and go through each, rating yourself on many of the suggestions. Of course you don't have to master everything, but you should be well rounded. Rate yourself for each to identify weaknesses and establish a plan of attack to turn these into strengths. This plan might involve home training, focus during dojo kumite and/or working with someone before or after class. As with all things in karate, it comes down to making wise investments into your future.

2. Theme Your Kumite. Pick one or two areas you wish to develop and work on these for days or weeks at a time. If you always spar with the same leg back, switch legs! If you love to attack, start to work on your counter, or pick off. Start setting traps etc. If you can't sweep, make it your priority. If you lack footwork then decide it's time to master it.

4. Incorporate Bunkai Into Your Kumite

Renowned Chinese philosopher Wang Yangming (1472-1529) coined the phrase "To know but not do is to not really know." This can apply to all areas of our lives; including karate. How often has your instructor advised you to do something and you say to yourself, "I know, I know." Once again, to know something yet not do it means you don't really know it. This is because head-knowledge is merely potential power. Real power comes from when that knowledge seeps from your conscious thought into every fibre of your being. In other words, the way you react to something without first thinking is indicative of your real knowledge.

» Bringing this over to bunkai, many karate-ka can tell someone (head-knowledge) what the numerous applications to a technique are. They will say, "You grab me like this and now I can do any of the following..." With this situation however they have foreknowledge of the attack. Few karate-ka however can execute bunkai effectively without prior knowledge of what their opponent will come at them with.

» Before we discuss turning our head-knowledge into real (or physical) knowledge, take note of the fact that any type of development must go through four stages of learning:

Stage 1. Unconscious Incompetence: This is where you are not even aware of your incompetence. Liken this to a karate-ka who has read many books and believes that makes them a master.

Stage 2. Conscious Incompetence: Known as enlightenment, the karate-ka becomes conscious of the fact they lack in an area. This awareness leads to the resolve and planning to improve.

Stage 3. Conscious Competence: Through continued effort and focus, the karate-ka is able to competently perform a task so long as their mind is focused on the job at hand.

Stage 4. Unconscious Competence: Also known as instinctive efficiency. Through extended practise, the karate-ka is able to competently perform a task without thought.

To take your head-knowledge of bunkai and turn it into real knowledge, you must be prepared to go through these four stages and one of the best places to start is with kumite.

» Decide in advance to incorporate a number of pre-determined bunkai into your kumite and work yourself into the situation that will allow you to effect these. This will give you the time required to transform your knowledge.

» Of course this cannot apply to all bunkai as many deal with an opponent who has any number of holds on you. These must be developed in your bunkai training. But there are still countless bunkai that can be safely practiced during kumite. Just a few examples are:

- Press in very close to an opponent so they instinctively grab you.
- Executing shuto-uke as a take-down.
- Working to get to the side of an opponent.

- Blocking, seizing, controlling.
- Various sweeps.
- Evasion tactics etc.

Remember: *Kumite is the physical expression of all your knowledge. Therefore to know bunkai, yet be unable to apply it against an unwilling opponent only demonstrates that you do not truly know it. It must be your goal to first learn bunkai, but then take it to the next level by being able to execute it in a non-pre-arranged environment.*