



The Aikido Schools of Ueshiba Yudansha Preparation Handbook



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Forward

What this handbook is

In theory, regular practice of Aikido under a qualified instructor will prepare a student to pass their black belt test and to handle situations of stress, aggression and violence. However, we are often nervous when test time approaches, as subconsciously we don't have confidence that normal *keiko* is sufficient preparation for the above-normal stress and performance associated with testing. We've all heard stories about students who have trained for a long time but had bad tests or even failed.

Psychology teaches us that humans perform best when provided clear and consistent goals and expectations, and then are given the tools to achieve them. This handbook was assembled to help bridge the gap between expectation and preparation by sharing the best advice of some of ASU's top instructors.

What this handbook is not

I consulted Saotome Sensei and Patty Sensei while compiling this handbook. While it has their endorsement and approval as an official ASU guidebook, nothing contained in this book is officially required for promotion. You should listen first and foremost to the advice of your own *sensei*. Implement what you find useful, and don't worry about the rest.

Who this handbook is for

This handbook is targeted primarily for Aikido students who wish to prepare for an upcoming black belt test or promotion. It is not specifically written for instructors, nor is it intended to supersede Aikido teachers' own methods for preparing their students. However, it contains some wonderful tips and tools for helping any *Aikidoka* get more out of their training at any level, and to help break through training 'plateaus'. Instructors may also get some ideas to augment their teaching methods by following the examples of ASU's leading *sensei*.

Good luck on your test!

Guy Hagen, Editor

Aikido Chuseikan of Tampa Bay

Six to Twelve Months Before Your Exam

You have sufficient time in grade, you have strong basic ability, and you know your techniques. Now is the time to begin preparing so that you can consistently perform under pressure, so that you can bring your technique to a new level, and you can begin to embody both clarity and composure on your test. At least six months before your test– if not long before that – you need to consistently invest yourself toward that change.

“Too many students 'cram' for the testing. I have weapons requirements on all kyu tests. By the time a student takes 1st kyu, he or she knows everything for nidan. That's the real secret... true preparation starts years out if they are going to be solid.”

— George Ledyard Sensei

“Teachers need to push and motivate some students, and calm down and support others. Teachers need to be sensitive to the individual needs and personality of each student. If this period prior to the test is not managed well, students will often look like they crammed to learn their weapons and waza, and the testing looks sloppy and somewhat premature for the level they are trying to achieve. It is up to the teacher and the student to manage these issues. However, in my view, teachers bear the greater responsibility as they have been through and observed this process numerous times whereas the student is going through the testing experience for the first time.”

— Josh Drachman Sensei

Work on the basics

There is a paradox in our Aikido training. We aspire to the subtle, amazing, almost magical technique taught to us by Saotome Shihan and Ikeda Shihan and our ASU *rokudans*; however, we are tested against, and must perform, clear basic technique. This is particularly true for *shodan* and *nidan* tests. *Keiko* at this point should emphasize clear, visible, very basic technique; movements should not be small and subtle, but large and clear as if demonstrating for textbook photos or for an audience a long distance away. All techniques should start and continue smoothly to completion – during test preparation, the candidate should set aside any habits of stopping techniques that meet resistance, or slowing techniques down to analyze them too much. Strive to always maintain a relaxed, alert, upright posture and stance.

“In general people need more kihon movement in their practice. I can see from many tests I have given that many people from many dojos do not know kihonwaza well. Shodan candidates need to demonstrate fundamental techniques right away, not ‘your style’ of technique. Nidan and sandan level tests should demonstrate more personal expression, but still be based on clean basic movement.”

— Hiroshi Ikeda Shihan

“...for the six months before the test, I start gearing the class material to the test. I do more kihonwaza and less aiki principle work. I have all the seniors work with the student

and keep the student away from the beginners. I have the seniors push him more while not making things so difficult that it becomes a confidence drain. The whole point is to develop a relaxed strong intention.”

— George Ledyard Sensei

Preparing for improvisation

Depending on what rank you are testing for, you will be expected to show spontaneous, improvised technique. Especially for *shodan* levels, spontaneous technique is very difficult to maintain when you find yourself suddenly challenged by a tough *uke*. Once you've been rattled, spontaneity goes out the window. As the pressure mounts, it becomes harder and harder to come up with the next "spontaneous" technique, or remember which technique you haven't demonstrated in a while.

Ironically, it is possible to prepare for – and improve – improvisation by rehearsing a fixed, regular pattern of techniques. Even top jazz musicians occasionally insert “riffs” borrowed from other classical, jazz, or other music genres while they improvise! Select five to seven techniques (ask your *sensei*), and find an order for them that flows naturally both verbally and physically. Practice chanting these techniques to yourself in the same order until you can, on demand, regurgitate them as one long word! For example, '*ikkyo-nikkyo-sankyo-kotegaeshi-irimi-kaiten*' etc. You should be able to “spit out” your sequence without hesitation or delay, on demand. Similarly, you should practice performing those techniques in sequence against every type of attack - even the ones which are rarely, if ever, called such as *ushiro tekubi shime*. This gives you a baseline that you can always rely on and fall back upon. During your test, you will start with your sequence; once started, your body will be able to perform a strong variety of basic techniques more or less on 'automatic'. This frees up your mind so that when an opportunity or inspiration arises to show a different technique, you can take advantage of it. When you run out of spontaneous techniques, you can smoothly drop back into your sequence and continue performing without so much as a moment's hesitation. When the time comes, don't worry about showing every variation of every Aikido technique possible; if the examiners want to see more, or see specific techniques, they'll ask for them.

“During an exam you are way more excited than your partners and you are moving much faster than you think. Consciously go slower or they won't keep up and you will look bad.

Have a plan in mind, so that when asked to do freestyle, you present a wide spectrum of technique, both omote and ura. You probably won't be thinking clearly, do you want a method to make this happen. Not only does this make you look good, it often prevents the board for asking for specific technique. I like to maximize the control I have and this is a good way to do this. Every technique is composed of irimi and tenkan. Make sure you do this and the rest will follow. ”

— Mike Lasky Sensei

Weapons kata — kumitachi and kumijo

In ASU, weapons *kata* are a component of all *yudansha* tests, and many instructors consider the weapons *kata* to be the most revealing part of an exam. The weapons *kata* are your chance to show how 'sharp' and precise your focus, concentration, and dedication is. *Kata* are the only portion of your test that you have 100% control over; you know your *uke*, you know the sequence, you have the opportunity to choreograph and rehearse over and over. Senior examiners generally consider there to be no excuse for a sloppy weapons portion, and especially no excuse to forget the sequence, fumble, or lose your place. Different instructors have different perspectives and ideals on what constitutes good weapons technique, but all will require a strong martial focus, precise movement, and a clear understanding of the 'purpose' behind each movement.

"In addition to the actual kata, I recommend students include, after each class, 10 minutes of solo weapon practice just moving and working on basic non-repetitive motion with staff and sword. Keep the movement as simple as possible using one- and two-hand grips; basically play with the sticks in order to build a level of subconscious confidence and deeper knowledge of the weapons."

—Kevin Choate Shihan

At least six months before your expected test, you should already know the *kata* well; at this point, it's time to pick a designated *kata* partner and drill, drill, drill. Make a standing schedule to meet and practice your *kata* two or three times a week, before or after class, or even over lunch. Find a rhythm, don't rush the footwork, and make each motion meaningful. Ideally you should pick a partner that is also testing, or your *sempai*. A strong *sempai* can help you 'bring your best game' to your test; but depending on your situation you may have to look for a partner on the day of the test, or use a junior (although that really isn't recommended). If you can't find a designated partner, be sure to practice with as many partners as possible to build your adaptability and confidence. If you are simply unable to practice *kata* regularly with a partner or partners, you should still commit to practicing the *kata* solo as *uke* and *nage* to internalize the sequences, footwork, and handwork. Finally, be sure to refine, synchronize, and not rush the 'protocol' portions of the *kata* — coming together, bowing, drawing the *bokken*, etc.

"We do a series of topical one day workshops on specific skill sets like weapons taking, koshinage, sword, jo, etc. The student is required to hit these as part of his preparation."

— George Ledyard Sensei

Preparing the heart, lungs, and mind — off the mat

The importance of committing to a regular, non-Aikido cardiovascular, aerobic and endurance regimen cannot be emphasized enough. Everybody's technique degrades as they become winded, so the longer you can postpone that moment the better your test will look. Any aerobic exercise will work, but the best ones will last for at least 30 minutes, keep your heart rate up, and support strong uninterrupted breathing. Swimming, while a fantastic low impact exercise, unfortunately tends to establish a breathing pattern that you can't use during your

test. Anaerobic, strength training or bodybuilding regimens do not tend to contribute much to test endurance.

“The most important single thing a student can do to prepare is to increase their endurance. The longer they can keep their wind, the longer they can maintain their composure and clean technique. They should begin a regular practice of running, biking, swimming, to build up their aerobic ability.

What I do for my students is several months before the test, I start throwing them for three minutes without a break. Each class, I add a minute or so. This way they can build up their endurance a little at a time, as part of class.”

— Wendy Whited Sensei

“It is also during the final year of training that endurance should be addressed. If an average student is training regularly and breathing properly endurance should not be a problem. Some students, however, may have physical problems that make endurance an issue. Proper diet, weight control and extra cardiovascular exercise should become a priority where necessary.”

— Tom and Mary McIntire Senseis

However, the real value from aerobic training is not physical, but mental. Sports psychology teaches us that *visualization* exercises have as much impact on actual performance as physical training (if balanced by proper physical training). If you commit properly, your off-the-mat endurance training won't steal time from your *keiko*, but instead multiply it! Endurance exercises are great because once you find your 'zone' your mind is freed up to wander or pursue other tasks. Your exercise — let's say bicycling — is your opportunity to get your heart rate up to a level that can support physical performance, a strong, comfortable breathing rhythm that you can maintain for a long time, and begin to visualize how you want to look performing every single aikido technique, in sequence, against every possible attack and type of *uke*. Picture yourself where you will be testing, calmly, confidently, and methodically demonstrating your techniques right and left, *ura* and *omote*. Mentally drill yourself performing the same sequence of techniques over and over. If there are potential *ukes* that intimidate you, or techniques you are not comfortable with, or physical / health problems, spend time visualizing yourself dealing with those issues proudly and masterfully all while pushing yourself physically. This will program your body and mind so that when your test starts, instead of slipping into stress adrenaline and ragged breathing, you will fall into a comfortable pattern that you can maintain for much longer than the actual duration of your test.

Make your weaknesses your strengths

If you have health or physical limitations that cannot be fixed by the time of your test, it's important to not just surrender and hope that the examination board will not hold it against you. Instead, you may have to find alternate solutions that allow you to maintain your posture, composure, clarity, and breath. For example, if you have bad knees, don't compensate by

bending over or neglecting your pins! Perhaps you can find a way to pin by putting one knee down, by performing deep, wide, good-posture squats, by developing standing pins, or by taking more time to methodically go to the ground for the pin. Find your own solutions that allow you to preserve your health while maintaining composure. Have a flexible mind, and don't be trapped into thinking that if you can't do technique the way healthy 20-year-olds do technique, all that's left is inferior. It's harder to find an exemplary way to do your technique without pushing yourself to further injury, than it is to prove your dedication by punishing your body past what is wise. *Budo* should make you stronger, and now is the time to use your creativity to find alternate solutions so that your test looks powerful and adaptive rather than handicapped.

“The only piece of real advice I would give a test candidate is to figure out what you hate to do, something you dread might come up on your test, some person you pray will not jump up as uke and then work on it or with them until it is no longer an issue. Then pick the next thing...and the next...and you'll be amazed at how quickly 30 years pass!”

— Don Mooock Sensei

“I think it is important for candidates to observe at least one real test (preferably one close to the curriculum and level of their own test) during this period so they can see for themselves what they will likely be called on to demonstrate.”

— Josh Drachman Sensei

Stress inoculation

In the US Special Forces, they refer to something called “stress inoculation”. In essence, what this means is exposing the candidate to stressful situations until some of the novelty wears off, and the situation becomes familiar enough that other reactions can be programmed than desperation, startlement, fight-or-flight, or panic. This has at least two components: the intentional cultivation of constructive stress, and repetitive exposure.

“A greater emphasis during training for examination should be placed on multiple attackers so that the basic movements don't fall apart under the stress of the situation. Too often treated lightly as just a right of passage, an important indicator of your understanding is your ability to see and to quickly assess a situation and respond while maintaining your cool under stress. It is the foundation and an important training tool for the next step in each student's training process.”

- Patty Saotome Shihan

"Try to create situations that take you to the point of failure, that challenge you, that literally put your back to the wall. Practice controlling your breathing in those situations, and retaining your basic form, posture, relaxation and movement.

During regular class you should train with more experienced people, train with people you don't like, train with people that don't like you. In post-class training your partner should be uncooperative as uke and rough as nage."

— Kevin Choate Shihan

Constructive stress requires a lot of commitment from your *dojo* and your *ukes*, as well as yourself. You must enter every engagement with the intent that you are going to pour 100% of your energy and attention into it, to not slouch, relax, or be defensive. This is particularly hard when you are the only person on the mat who is trying to maintain a high level of energy output, so don't be afraid to ask for help. Your *ukes* must attack you with all the sincere force they can muster, but it's especially important that they practice "exam-style *uke*" behavior: powerful, clear attacks that require *nage* to respond, but without a hint of trying to struggle with, stop, or outmuscle *nage*. Yes, the *yudansha* candidate should be able to perform clear basic technique on any opponent, but nothing is demonstrated by an *uke* who attacks defensively or with intent to "shut *nage* down", and several months of training with this type of *uke* will not prepare you for a test you can be proud of. Again, do not be afraid to ask your *ukes* to attack you differently, or ask your instructor to help create a more intense training environment. Although *ukes* should be attacking with all their heart, they should also be committed to take complete, full-speed *ukemi* for you so that you can practice performing a technique from its start to its finish, every time. When you find an *uke* that helps push you into the "stress zone" and takes good *ukemi*, take the opportunity to work with them before and/or after class regularly.

"We try to get people in the habit of doing extra work after class before every test starting from 6th kyu. Further we expect each person to help others prepare. So by dan ranks what we want is

- 1. Commitment to do the pre-test work for 6 months to a year*
- 2. Use that work to make a real change in how the individual does Aikido.*
- 3. The dojo community should be right there supporting the individual.*

What I want to see is a base level of skill and then a commitment to work, continue learning and help others. Anything in particular I tell a person is my best guess as what will work to keep them on a even psychological keel and progressing. I used to be very Japanese, i.e. little praise and lots of criticism. I have consciously changed that."

— Chuck Weber Sensei

You can "stress inoculation" train for any part of your examination – open hand, *suwari waza*, weapons take-away, and *randori*. During this phase of your training, encourage your *ukes* to

attack you as if it were your test at the beginning of every attack. Do this again, and again, and again...

Pushing yourself — on the mat

Most instructors agree that promotion candidates have the responsibility to take control of their training, and create opportunities to push their limits outside of class and to seek challenges during training.

"It's pretty much possible to attain every white belt rank if you just show up long enough. Dan ranks have little meaning, however, if students just "coast into" their rank promotions. If you don't invest a higher level of effort into your yudansha training, how can you expect your abilities to reach a higher level? I like to see testing candidates training hard before and after class for several months before they might be testing. I want to see their commitment to push themselves, and their sincere desire to move beyond their current limits. Real growth requires sustained extra effort."

— John Messores Shihan

"Once a student has passed the 1st kyu test their basic technique should be a good representation of their instructor and the weapons forms should be memorized; assuming that and assuming that they are training 3 days a week; I would suggest (for all ranks) 20 to 30 minutes of extra training each training day.

Students can increase their stamina by taking more non resistive ukemi in regular classes. Instead of 4/ 4 constantly, pyramid start at 4/4 and work your way up 4/4, 4/6, 4/8, 4/10, 4/12 4/fail (meaning the candidate throws their partner four times, then the partner throws the candidate 4, 6, 8, or 12 times)."

— Kevin Choate Shihan

Three Months Before Your Exam

Three months before your test, your training should change. Your focus should change to reinforcing and polishing the technique you know, and no longer think about learning different ways to execute technique differently. The test is close enough that you may start feeling stress and wondering if you are ready. In these last three months, it is time to train your attitude and vision, and set a standard and image of what your test will look like. It is now time to "amp up" your training so that you don't coast into your test, but come into your test investing 110% effort.

"The last month or so, I would focus on henko waza. I do classes in which I tell the partners to be a bit more of an jerk when they work with the student. The emphasis is on having the student stay relaxed when things don't work cleanly. If a partner plants or resists unwisely, I want to see some atemi waza and an instant change in technique with no change in the emotional load the student carries. That's the real focus on the last phase of preparation. I want to see calm intensity throughout. I focus on projection of a "sphere of intention" that makes it appear to everyone watching that the student "owns" his space and the ukes are just "guests" in his space. If something doesn't work, I don't even want to see a reaction by the student... I want to see him make whatever change is appropriate as if it were what he intended all along."

— George Ledyard Sensei

"The test prep advice is different for each student; I tend to call each up in front of the class starting about 3 months before the scheduled test and ask for random techniques and then run them through a quick randori. As each student is different they get different coaching. Sometimes I ask them to slow down, sometimes to speed up, sometimes to open up and sometimes to focus more; [it depends on each student]."

— Wendy Palmer Sensei

"During this time we tend to have at least one class specifically for test preparation. In this class the sensei will call for techniques and the students will change partners between techniques, but no demonstrations are done. This means that students train for at least 45 minutes without stopping. If this doesn't happen during a regular class, the shodan candidate should attempt to get other students together and arrange a similar situation outside of class time. During this special class, the shodan candidate is encouraged to concentrate on posture, timing, breathing, and controlling the situation. Any student who can do this has the stamina [and focus] for a shodan test."

—Tom and Mary McIntire Senseis

"Teachers need to know their students. Motivate the ones that need to be pushed. Support and calm those that put too much pressure on themselves. Feed each the tools they need to go out and perform optimally."

— Josh Drachman Sensei

Embodiment – choosing your mantra

A mantra is a chant to help focus meditation, and it has value for training too. At this point your sequence of techniques, endurance breathing, and mental visualization of yourself performing against all techniques, attacks, and *ukes* should be automatic. As a result, you should have sufficient attention span to add a new tool.

Believe it or not, you have the ability to select one adjective that other people may use to describe your test (assuming you have prepared sufficiently). Choose a single word that you would like to embody physically, mentally, and spiritually, but preferably one that is appropriate to the rank you are testing for and is descriptive of performance. Examples could include "precise", "masterful", "unshakable", "professional", "confident", "in control", etc., whatever appeals to you. Poor examples include "like a *shihan*" (too subtle, too vague), "elegant" (not really what your examiners are looking for), or "powerful" (possibly leading to muscular or violent technique).

"All too often the warrior spirit doesn't make an appearance during examination. By that, I don't mean power, speed, or technical ability, but attitude, focus, and bearing. How do you train to embody the spirit of a warrior, the true heart and soul of Aikido? Maybe it must already be within you. But concentrate on the reason behind each basic movement, on developing the control necessary to choose compassion, but always be prepared for any possibility. If you hold the integrity, pride and honor of the spirit of protection foremost in your mind that focus will directly influence your attitude and the movement of your body in the same way the physical training in basic technique influences your mind and with work and dedication you may come to embody the warrior spirit."

— Patty Saotome Shihan

Off the mat, continue your aerobic-plus-visualization training, only now be sure to mentally vocalize your adjective, and clearly imagine how your demeanor and actions will manifest that adjective as you perform your practice sequence. On the mat, mentally chant your adjective to yourself as you train, reminding yourself to reflect your adjective in how you stand, how you move, how you meet *uke*, and how you perform your technique. You may find that by repeating this to yourself during *keiko*, that it will help you manifest – and make habitual – on the outside what you have been rehearsing *inside*.

"Attention to mental attitude is vitally important at this stage. I usually tell students to take command, to make the dojo their stage where nothing they do is wrong so they can move confidently even when they confront mistakes or hit a snag with either a partner they don't know how to manage or an off kilter attack or whatever the challenge may be."

— Josh Drachman Sensei

Connection / Zanshin / Kamae

During your test, you will not be graded just upon how you perform your technique, but also how you convey yourself and how you stay connected to your *uke* during the entire test. Examiners will be alert for candidates that slump in relief after throwing *uke*, or who start to slouch as they tire, who turn their back on their *uke*, or who even look like they aren't really awake. Long before your *yudansha* test, it is important to practice maintaining a powerful, intense connection to your *ukes* during regular *keiko* from the time you bow to them until the time you bow to somebody else. Practice controlling your distance, timing, and when your partner attacks by how strongly you project your *mu to kamae* (no-sword sword stance) at all times; practice demonstrating your connection to your partner through your hands and eyes so clearly that somebody thirty feet away could see it clearly!

"I watch candidates while they are sitting, waiting to be tested. Are they attentive? Are their backs straight even if they are sitting cross-legged? If they are kneeling during a technique, are their feet together? If they are slouching or spread all over, it shows a lack of self-discipline."

— Duane "PeeWee" Jones Sensei

Change your mindset

It's often useful at this stage in your training to examine your feelings toward your test. Most people dread their black belt tests, and when asked will say they "wish the test were just over with". However, if you mentally "step back", you may realize that you not only don't dread your test, you *crave* it. You have already spent months preparing – not to mention the years of *keiko* and seminars before that – and if your instructor came to you now and said "oh, we didn't think you would perform well, so here's your black belt anyway" you would be disappointed, right? We all actually want to be tested in front of our peers and instructors and perform so well that everybody says "wow, that was amazing!" The dread comes from not knowing what the test is going to be like, or fear that you won't perform well.

Remember that Aikido is not just a sport, it's a spiritual art; you are training to *change the type of person you are* and *who you are in society, to your friends, and your family*. If you have dedicated yourself to improving your physical technique with the right attitude, you can expect that on the other side of that test you will come home a slightly different person – one that you chose to be. With dedication and sacrifice, you have polished your mind and body to be something that you admire and others admire too. While the earning of a black belt does not denote mastery, and the purpose of training is not to earn belts, the exams have an important purpose in that they provide these challenges and moments of transformation that let us prove to ourselves "we have become something more than we were yesterday".

"Overall, I believe in the transformative power of the testing experience and believe it is a vital part of the Aikido development process. I really find that students who get to the other side of the testing experience mature, grow and make good progress toward achieving more advanced levels of the art. They usually look very different from those

that do not go through the testing process. I tell students I look not just at execution but how much they have changed and improved in judging performance. I have found this gets good results in motivating candidates to do the best they can."

— Josh Drachman Sensei

With these thoughts in mind, ask yourself how you would feel today if your test, your transformation, your challenge, and the end result of all your training were taken away. You'd be frustrated and outraged! Realize that you *want your test*, and you *are looking forward to the transformation you are investing yourself toward*. With that in your heart, the day you step on the mat it will be clear to everybody that you are there with a purpose.

Looking professional — early notice

Sure, your old *dogi* with all the holes in it shows that you've trained hard. However, it's important to make the right impression during your test, and show that you are taking your test seriously, and that you respect your examination board. You will be representing your *dojo* and your own instructors, so it is a good idea to make sure you look sharp and professional for your test. Take a good look at your *dogi*, *hakama*, and weapons, and decide if you need to make any repairs or if it's time to order replacements!

The Week Before Your Exam

You've been pushing yourself hard for six months. You are tired both physically and mentally, but charged with anticipation. Now is a great time to ... *take a break!* Take a week off from Aikido. Keep some light cardio/aerobic exercise up to keep your muscles loose, but give your body a rest. Get a massage. Go to a spa, spend time in a hot tub! Find time to get extra sleep. Go do something fun with your friends or family, just don't abuse your body. You won't lose anything at this point by letting your body recuperate and build up strength. It's OK to think about your test and how you want it to look, but don't feel you need to!

Looking professional — final preparations

As discussed earlier, it's a good idea for you to look sharp and professional for your test, and represent your *dojo* well. Remember that your test might be videotaped, and your test will probably set your reputation among your peers and instructors for a long time. Get a good haircut. Wash your uniforms, and keep a clean one set aside for the day of your test!

“If you look at any culture, you will see that part of the warriors' spirit is revealed in their orderly appearance, how they care for their equipment, and how they manifest mindfulness, leadership, and attention to detail. On a test, we aren't just looking at physical ability, but the potential to lead, the ability to manifest those traits.”

— John Messores Shihan

Prepare your paperwork

Instructions for obtaining, and completing, the required application forms are included later in this handbook. You are expected to bring these applications and other materials (such as signed check and your existing passbook, if applicable) to the day of your examination. However, it's best to prepare your paperwork carefully and far enough in advance to mail or email to the individual who is handling the examination paperwork at the test seminar, and to prepare copies to bring with you as well.

The Seminar of Your Exam

Most *yudansha* tests are performed during a regional seminar. ASU policy states that black belt examinations should be held before a panel of ASU *godan* or *rokudan* instructors, or before Ikeda Sensei or Saotome Sensei (who rarely if ever sits for exams). That means that you will be training right up to the moment of your test.

"On the day or the night or two before, the main focus for the student and teacher should be appropriate mental attitude. Drilling more techniques, while a normal response to the pressure of an impending test, is probably not very productive beyond a certain point. I usually tell the inhibited, formal types to let it go, own the stage they will occupy during the test, stay in themselves and make it happen. Think big, act big, do big. The less disciplined types, I encourage to stay focused on the task at hand and as cleanly as possible execute, execute, execute. For both types, it is important to have them believe there is nothing they will see out there during the exam that they cannot manage or resolve even if it is off curriculum or out of the ordinary. In any case, I think it is important to show real support and encouragement and that you, as the teacher, are there for the student throughout the whole process."

— Josh Drachman Sensei

Don't try to learn anything new

Nobody has probably ever told you that before, and it might be easier to say than do. If the seminar *sensei* show you anything new or give you technique advice, it is best to follow their instructions – but don't try to significantly change what you've been practicing for the last six months for your actual test. Don't let yourself be confused, or force your body into a different "groove" than what it is now prepared for. After your test, you can remember and apply all of the new wisdom you have just learned.

Feel out your *ukes*

While you probably won't know who your *ukes* will be for your test, you should be able to identify the entire pool of *potential ukes* before your test. Seek out and train with all possible test *ukes* that are at the seminar – especially people that are unfamiliar to you. Set their expectations in advance of the test; let them know through training how you will be handling them, and make it clear by your movements that you will be requiring them to take full, clear *ukemi* and that they can trust you to perform technique safely. It is also your responsibility to show confidence, humility, compassion, and a smile, so that they do not feel the need to "put you in your place" or are afraid to attack you properly. Determine if they are going to give you difficulty: will they give poor attacks? Will they try to drag you down on *randori*? Will they try to be sneaky or reverse you on open hand? Prepare yourself mentally before your exam, so if they come before you, you will not be caught off guard. Prepare *them* mentally so they know without a doubt how you will be dealing with them on the test and that there will only be one clear ending to each technique – a clear throw and pin without hesitation from you.

“Don’t get too used to the same ukes. Train with all types of ukes before your test - tall, short, large, small, and strong.”

— Duane “PeeWee” Jones Sensei

Eat and sleep right

The night before your test, try to get plenty of sleep. Keep yourself well hydrated, and take plenty of electrolytes and good food (nothing particularly greasy or heavy). Try not to drink much, even if it is a time-honored ASU tradition! The day of your test, it is generally recommended that you eat plenty of carbs – a mix of fast carbs (like fruit) and slower carbs (like pasta). A quick Internet search will give plenty of really good recommendations for sports nutrition that match your dietary preferences, and it’s not a bad idea to plan your “before-test” meals well in advance so that you know your body will have all the resources it needs for maximum performance.

“We recommend that candidates eat moderately and stay well hydrated on this day! Since yudansha testing often takes place at weekend seminars, it is a good idea to avoid heavy meals and hardy partying before the test takes place.”

— Tom and Mary McIntire Senseis

Practice manifesting your spirit

If you can find a time after the *dojo* or mat is clear of people, practice bowing in. Often, candidates are nervous, and when they are called up they rush through the bowing in – setting the tone and pace for their entire test. This is a good chance for you to familiarize yourself with the *space* you will be testing in, and practice starting your test off right. Imagine your name being called, and with dignity and focus proceed to the *kamiza* as if *you are the sensei about to lead class*. Without hurry, settle down to *seiza*, focus, take a deep breath, and bow. When you turn to the examination board *show them with your eyes what kind of test you are going to demonstrate* – fierce, confident, determined! Practice the bowing protocol once or twice until you can feel that when the test starts *you will own the mat!*

“During examination I always look first into the student’s eyes.”

— Patty Saotome Shihan

Introduce yourself

We have found that it’s a really good idea to introduce yourself to your examination board at the start of the seminar, and let them know you are a candidate. Often, the examining *sensei* may not personally know who the candidates are, or how well they have prepared, or really anything about them. Even if the *sensei* do know you personally, they probably don’t know as much about you as a student as would be useful for them to know while watching your test. By introducing yourself, you give them a chance to watch you train during seminar classes, and to discuss you with other *sensei*. It is also a good time to ask the examiners what they would like to see emphasized on your test, and any particular performance specifics – for example, would they like to see *omote* right and left on one technique, and *ura/tenkan* right and left on another technique?

Or would they prefer to see right-left omote-ura *tenkan* on every technique, even at the cost of dragging out the test? Let them give you their preferences and wishes and any last minute advice they care to share.

We have also found at our annual Florida Rokudan seminars that it is very helpful to prepare a short “bio sheet” that profiles you and your readiness to test, as well as any special health or other considerations that the examiners should know. A sample bio sheet is included at the end of this handbook.

The Test

The time has arrived! Keep these last few reminders in mind as your test begins.

“I remind students that the test is a collective effort – you are not alone – and your test is not yours alone. It is a gift back to all those who have helped you – a chance to show them that you were paying attention, listening to them – it is a thank you for the gift of training from your entire dojo and teachers. we all test together – so you are not alone!”
– Robin Cooper Sensei

Focus on the basics

Remember to focus on posture, clarity, composure and *basics*. We all attend seminars by Ikeda Sensei, Saotome Sensei and others where they dazzle and inspire us with seemingly impossibly subtle movement. That is the goal to which we all aspire - but not the goal to which we are tested, particularly for *shodan* and *nidan*. Saotome Sensei has emphasized that we must first all start from a strong, common foundation, and your test will be about how clearly you can display those fundamentals.

Composure

Slow down. Pin at every opportunity. Every time you pin, take a strong, deep breath. Don't let *uke's* speed rush you; no matter how hard or fast *uke* attacks, you do not have to speed up to match. Make your movements large and clear as if you were demonstrating for the audience “way up in the cheap seats”. At natural points in each technique, dramatically show your control and understanding of the *waza*. Imagine that your actions are being photographed for an instructional manual, and each movement must be visible and distinct to the viewer.

I'm still nervous...

You're expected to be; it wouldn't be much of a test if you weren't pushed outside of your comfort zone. Just remind yourself that by this point, you have invested 100, 200, 300 or more hours preparing just for this moment. All of the *ukes* that will step before you haven't prepared at all; they “just showed up” for the seminar. Trust yourself and know that if you truly have committed yourself to preparation, your test will only push you hard enough to really shine. Tell yourself that during the test, it is *your mat* and everyone else is there with your permission.

“The day of the test is always a challenge. The worst part is anticipation and knowing that can make the day go easier. Remembering to control posture, timing and breathing will help to calm nerves and make an enormous difference in the test.”

— Tom and Mary McIntire Senseis

Interacting with the examiners

Always treat the examination board with utmost respect, never treat them casually or informally. If you did not hear the name of a technique, are confused, or have a problem which must be addressed (such as an injury), you should face the examiners, bow, and ask as politely and succinctly as possible. Usually a simple “Sensei?” will suffice. If the examiners give you

special instructions, you should acknowledge them with “*Hai*, Sensei!”, and never with a casual nod, wave, “yeah”, or “ok”. Never put your hands on your hips, never ignore the examiners, and never argue with them. Even if the examiners are mistaken, agreeing with them and following their instructions demonstrates humility and dedication.

Candidate Qualifications

As I asked for their testing preparation advice, a few senior instructors shared their expectations for each level of *yudansha* rank. These are the goals for which students should be training, and the attributes they should be cultivating within themselves.

“Shodan: form. Good standard technique, classical form is what I want most to see in terms of technique. Aikido instructors teach different styles and the judges will respect another's choice of variations. When choosing technique to be demonstrated it must be a stylistic variation that the candidate is completely familiar and comfortable with. It should be technique with which the candidate is completely capable and proficient. All technique should be fully completed including pins and weapon-removal. Maintain proper attitude towards uke even after the technique is completed. If demonstrating ji yu waza the candidate should choose their techniques and variations before the test. Know what you are going to do and then do it. Use pinning as a time to breathe and plan your next technique. The candidate must maintain good attitude and posture throughout the test. Try not to talk to the judges unless you cannot hear or understand the requests.

Nidan: power. I want to see that the candidate can now apply more power in their technique. You should be able to control a much bigger, stronger, more aggressive uke. A good martial spirit that is never comical, degrading, silly, or lackadaisical is essential.

Sandan: effectiveness. Ukes will not be restricted to simple flowing attacks. They are expected to give candidates a difficult time. Candidates must be able to control difficult attackers.

In general all candidates must take care of their ukes and show proper respect for the judges, their ukes the dojo (kamidana) and guests.”

— John Messores Shihan

“Shodan is the beginning. At this stage the most important thing is the application and precision of basic movement and technique appropriate to your level.”

— Patty Saotome Shihan

“... for shodan I expect clean, clear distinctions of the parts within the technique. Nothing fancy even if they can [show fancy technique]. Basically I want to see that they can demonstrate the alphabet and can move with an even pacing through the moves. Posture and extension are important.

For nidan I expect all of the above and more ability to effect the timing of the interaction. Instead of waiting for uke to attack they need to be able to lead uke so the interactions become more fluid. I am open to a little more creativity in some of the variations and the ability to improvise in unknown situations.

For sandan I expect more creativity in the variations – the ability to make small or subtle adjustments as the technique unfolds. Also the ability to handle more speed and power without losing confidence and relaxation.”

— Wendy Palmer Sensei

"Shodan: focus on smooth continuous movement and breathing. Proper control of distance at the beginning and end of the technique (1 tatami standing, ½ sitting). Proper execution of pins or final postures. Front and rear movements should be clear and distinct. Power is not necessary, but clarity is essential.

Nidan: Your first test confirmed your knowledge of the basic forms of the art; the second should test you under stress.

Sandan: OK, you're tough! Your basic technique will never be questioned again, it is yours, show your respect, your ability to present it, and your desire to explore. Strive to represent a deeper understanding of the basic forms their difficulties and their limitations."

— Kevin Choate Sensei

"In order to answer these questions I feel compelled to address the issue of the meaning of yudansha and how we (Mary and I) view this pivotal accomplishment in an aikidoka's training. We are all familiar with the concept that shodan marks the beginning rather than the culmination of training. It is our view that time spent in the kyu ranks is, in a sense, time primarily spent learning how to train. It is during this time that a student learns basic Aikido technique and how to interact with their training partners to make the training experience productive for both parties. By the time a student attains the rank of shodan he/she should be able to go to any dojo where Aikido is taught and be able to participate in keiko. During the kyu rank phase of a student's training they also learn the proper etiquette and attitudes conducive to practical and productive training."

—Tom and Mary McIntire Senseis

How To Complete the Yudansha Application Forms

The following instructions have been posted by Patty Saotome Sensei, and apply to all ASU promotion *yudansha* candidates:

“ASU can no longer accept promotion request forms that are incomplete or not clearly written. The Aikikai takes the information for certificates, yudansha passbooks and membership cards directly from the forms you fill out. To avoid misspellings the forms must be legible. To avoid having ASU return the forms to you for completion all information must be included. Please use the following guidelines.

It only takes a couple of minutes to do this carefully and correctly and we appreciate your cooperation. “

— Patty Saotome Shihan, (12/22/2003)

To help increase the legibility of ASU applications and meet the requirements set by ASU administration, the *yudansha* application forms are available for download in Adobe Acrobat “fill-in form” format at the following URLs, and as attachments at the end of this handbook. Please follow these guidelines and bring your completed application forms with you and present them to the head examiner in advance of your test. Please make sure that the forms you provide are legible and printed in high quality; facsimiles and poor copies can introduce errors and make your forms difficult to process.

- <https://box298.bluehost.com/~asucom/category/library/>

Unless you are instructed otherwise, it is best to mail or email your forms to the head examiner in advance of your test *and* bring printed copies as backup to the day of your examination, along with a check to “Aikido Schools of Ueshiba”. The promotion fee depends on your rank and current US-Japan currency exchange rates, and may not be precisely specified until the day of your test. *If you have one, bring your existing yudansha passbook and provide it to the head examiner* with your check and application forms. If you have lost your passbook, you can request a replacement passbook for an additional fee.

Application for Dan Grades

1. **Surname:** Provide your last (family) name.
2. **First name:** Provide your first name.
3. **Date and Place of Birth:** Provide your birthdate (MM/DD/YYYY) and State/USA of your birth.
4. **Sex:** Check the box indicating your gender.
5. **Address:** Provide your current mailing address.
6. **Nationality:** Provide your current citizenship (USA).
7. **Occupation:** Indicate, in one or two words, your current occupation.
8. **Signature of Candidate:** Provide your signature.

9. **Number of Aikikai Membership:** If you are testing for *shodan* or transferring with rank from an organization not affiliated with Hombu, please leave this blank. If you have previous Hombu rank, provide the Aikikai number indicated in your passbook. **Do not** provide your ASU member number.
10. **Date of Aikikai Registration:** If you are testing for *shodan* or transferring with rank from an organization not affiliated with Hombu, please leave this blank. If you have previous Hombu rank, provide the Aikikai registration date indicated in your passbook.
11. **Present Rank, test location, and Examiner:** Please specify as briefly as possible. Recommended answers for “Where and When” follow the format “City ST, MM/YY”. Recommended answers for Name of Examiner are first initial, last name (e.g., “H. Ikeda”). If you are applying for *nidan* or higher, you must use the exact information for your previous test that is printed in your *yudansha* passbook.
12. **Date of Starting Aikido:** Please specify the month and year of your first Aikido class or seminar (e.g., “MM/YYYY”).
13. **Name of Dojo:** Please specify the name of the *dojo* to which you are currently primarily affiliated and training. You should probably provide city and state (e.g. “Shobukan Dojo, Washington D.C.”)
14. **Date and Place of Examination:** Ask the head examiner of where you will be testing how they would prefer the location to be indicated for consistency; if not known, it is OK to leave this blank. It is recommended that you format your results in the form of “*dojo*, city and state” (e.g. “Shobukan Dojo, Washington D.C.”).
15. **Grade Obtained:** Leave this blank.
16. **Examiner’s Signature:** Leave this blank.
17. Leave this blank.

Aikido Headquarters Registration Form

1. **Membership No.:** If you are testing for *shodan* or transferring with rank from an organization not affiliated with Hombu, please leave this blank. If you have previous Hombu rank, provide the Aikikai number indicated in your passbook. **Do not** provide your ASU member number.
2. **First Name:** Provide your first name.
3. **Last Name:** Provide your last (family) name.
4. **Male or Female:** Please write down your gender (male / female)
5. **Date of Birth:** Provide your birthdate (MM/DD/YYYY)
6. **Nationality:** Provide your current citizenship (USA).
7. **Address:** Provide your current mailing address.
8. **Occupation:** Indicate, in one or two words, your current occupation.
9. **Signature:** Provide your signature.

Aikikai Foundation: Application for International Yudansha Card

1. **Date:** The date of your examination / promotion.
2. **Surname:** Provide your last (family) name.
3. **First Name:** Provide your first name.

4. **Date of Birth (Day) / (Month) / (Year):** Provide as requested.
5. **Sex:** Provide as requested.
6. **Occupation:** Provide as previously indicated.
7. **Nationality:** (USA)
8. **Address:** Provide as requested.
9. **Aikikai Membership Number:** If you are testing for *shodan* or transferring with rank from an organization not affiliated with Hombu, please leave this blank. If you have previous Hombu rank, provide the Aikikai number indicated in your passbook. **Do not** provide your ASU member number.
10. **National Organization:** “Aikido Schools of Ueshiba”
11. **Representative:** “Shihan Mitsugi Saotome”
12. **Dojo:** Please specify the name of the *dojo* to which you are currently primarily affiliated and training. You should probably provide city and state (e.g. “Shobukan Dojo, Washington D.C.”)
13. **Instructor:** Please specify the name of the head instructor of your current dojo.

Shodan candidates should leave the “previous rank table” blank. Candidates for ranks *nidan* and higher should fill out this table using the information provided on the second page of your Aikikai *yudansha* passbook.

Creating a Candidate Biography Sheet

ASU *yudansha* candidates are usually expected to be tested at a regional seminar, before a committee of senior ASU instructors, or before Ikeda Shihan or Saotome Shihan. In these situations, the examiners may have to review numerous candidates at a seminar, and they may not know you well enough to recognize you or remember your qualifications (or special considerations) for testing. By providing a very brief “introduction sheet” to the members of the examination committee, we have found that the examiners were appreciative of the additional information and that it helped them assess the candidates better. While these introduction/bio sheets are not mandatory, we do encourage you to use the template “candidate biography sheet” provided at the end of this handbook or create one of your own. Bring enough copies to distribute to *every* examiner. The following section describes the parts of the template, and why they are important pieces of information to provide your examination committee. A sample biography outline is included at the end of this handbook.

Examination profile:

provide the instructors a current photo (preferably a clean headshot, and in Aikido uniform) so that the examiners can recognize you during the test, and during the seminar leading up to the test. Make all the most important information quickly available, including your name, *dojo*, rank you are testing for, the date of your last examination, and your current age. Also provide the name of the instructor that has recommended you for promotion (your *sensei*).

Recent Seminars and Test Qualifications:

The ASU Student Handbook lists specific requirements for *yudansha* promotion, including number of training days and classes since last promotion, and recent seminars with Ikeda Sensei or Saotome Sensei that the student has attended. The examiners can only assume that the candidate has met these minimum requirements, but it is a good idea to indicate how she has met and exceeded the requirements.

Training Background:

Briefly indicate or checklist how long you have been training in Aikido, and what other styles or martial arts you have trained or ranks you have attained. Sometimes, these will help the examination committee appreciate your readiness and your particular idiosyncrasies.

Professional Summary:

Very briefly describe your occupation, educational, and professional attainments. Most instructors appreciate work-life balance!

Dojo Contributions:

This section should be written by your recommending instructor. Beyond physical performance, the candidate’s commitment to supporting the *dojo*, the Aikido community, and other students is important. For some candidates, their contribution and commitment to Aikido is more important than their physical capabilities. Have your instructor write a few words about your contributions and leadership. Encourage them to be specific; for example “she always trains after class and

goes out of her way to work with junior students every day” will be more useful to the examiners than “she is a strong supporter of the *dojo*”.

Note from Instructor:

In the end, the reason you are being considered for promotion is the recommendation from your instructor. Every examination committee wants to know that your instructor is backing their recommendation of you, and some words from your instructor to the examination committee will help reinforce their trust. It is also a good idea for your instructor to list any special health considerations or injuries that limit your endurance or ability to perform particular techniques like *suwari waza*, so that the examiners have these limitations in front of them while they call your test!

Seminar Correspondence and Administration

Hundreds of ASU promotions are submitted every year, and it's our responsibility as organizers and *dojo cho* to be professional and detail oriented.

Recommending Instructors

It is sometimes necessary to recommend a student for *dan* promotion without testing at a seminar due to age, health, or because their rank is *sandan* or higher. Of course these types of recommendations can be corresponded directly to ASU administration. Even then, it helps to “announce” such promotions at a regional seminar, and submit their promotion paperwork along with the other promotions.

Regardless, and even if you are used to sending paperwork directly to Patty Sensei, ***you should send recommendations and promotion paperwork for your students to the organizer of the event where they are testing***, even if you are told it is OK for you to do otherwise. Sticking to the “process” makes it easier on everybody, including Ikeda Sensei, Patty Sensei, and our seminar organizers.

Seminar Organizers

Just as each individual test candidate has the responsibility to provide properly completed paperwork and payment for examination fees, it is the seminar organizer's responsibility to collect and coordinate all the paperwork for all the test candidates and submit it to ASU administration in a single organized packet. Please do not presume upon your seniority or your relationship with Patty Sensei to send paperwork in piecemeal, or assume that somebody else will check for mistakes.

Checklist for paperwork:

- A letter to ASU Headquarters providing details about the examination venue, the examining instructors, and detailed list of promotion candidates
- Verification that each student met minimum promotion requirements, and has the recommendation of their instructor(s)
- Sorted, legible, error-checked documents for each student:
 - Passport (if promoted to *nidan* or higher)
 - Complete Application for Dan Grades form
 - Complete Aikido World Headquarters Application for International Yudansha Card
 - Check or money order payable to “Aikido Schools of Ueshiba” for the amount of examination fee

A sample seminar promotion packet letter is included at the end of this handbook. Of course, you can elaborate or use any format of letter that you wish, so long as you are organized and complete.

Candidate Preparation Checklist

- Develop a training plan, and know what you will focus on for several months before your potential testing date. Ask your instructor help you focus on what is essential, and discuss what they want you to focus on.
- Make certain that your instructor has OKd your test for the seminar administrators, head examiners at the testing event, or with Patty Saotome Sensei or Ikeda Sensei.
- Have your paperwork prepared and submitted in advance, and bring copies to the actual exam along with a check to ASU.
- Make sure your weapons, uniform, *hakama* and general appearance will be clean and in good order for your exam.

Sample Documents

Seminar Promotions Letter

Date

Patty Saotome Shihan
Aikido Schools of Ueshiba
29165 Singletary Road
Myakka City FL 34251

Subject: Yudansha Promotions

Dear Patty:

I am pleased to submit the successful yudansha promotions from the January 1, 2011 seminar in Tampa, Florida. The examining instructors included _____, _____ and _____. Each of the following candidates tested to the satisfaction of the instructors and were promoted to their new ranks. For each candidate, you will find enclosed a check to the Aikido Schools of Ueshiba for their examination fees, as well as all required application forms and passports.

Student Name	ASU # (where applicable)	New Rank	Test Fees
Total Fees Submitted			\$

Each of the candidates provided documentation that they met minimum requirements for promotion, or came with the recommendation of their sensei. If you have any questions, please contact me.

Respectfully,

Seminar Administrator
ASU Dojo Name
Contact information

Yudansha Candidate Biography

	Name:	
	Dojo:	
	Instructor:	
	Testing for:	
	Last Promotion:	
	Age / Born	

Training Background:

Recent Seminars:

Dojo Contributions:

Professional Summary:

Note from Instructor:

Notes and Acknowledgements

How this handbook came about

I hope this will continue to be an evolving effort. It started when I wrote down a few pieces of advice I received when I was preparing for *shodan*, and the bits and pieces on performance theory and sports psychology that I picked up along the way. A few pieces of advice were so helpful that I actively solicited advice from my teachers and *sempai* for my next tests, and started to share what I learned with my friends and *kohei* who were also testing. I eventually compiled a short list of tips that really seemed to make a difference, and continued to collect feedback from others to refine what worked and filter out what didn't.

In 2002, my Aikido brother Don Ellingsworth and I helped to first establish what was to become the annual Florida Rokudan Seminar (now the "Florida Shihan Seminar"). This seminar, taught by five or six ASU *rokudan* or higher instructors, has been hosted alternately by the University of South Florida (Tampa), Shindai Aikikai (Orlando), and ASU Sarasota annually each August. It has become an important event for testing many ASU *yudansha*, and has given the instructors an opportunity to express what they think is important in a strong black belt test. These *sensei* had wonderful advice to share and were passionate about maintaining a high standard of quality for ASU practitioners, and I decided I was in a good position to support their vision and compile their collective experience.

In 2010, I asked the following question to Saotome Sensei, Ikeda Sensei, and almost all of the ASU *Ueshiba Juku* instructors of *rokudan* rank or higher: "what are the most important recommendations you would give to a student preparing for their black belt exam, six months before, three months before, or just before their test?" I organized their responses (and the best of the other advice I received from other experts along the way) into this book.

Editing conventions and quotes

Japanese terms have been standardized, lower-cased and italicized, except for formal names and titles. Americanized plural forms have been allowed as they are commonly used in English and may reduce confusion (e.g. "*ukes*", "*rokudans*"). I have taken liberties to alter quotes to make grammar, tense, and subject consistent with the rest of this document.

Instructor quotes were selected and arranged to exemplify and illustrate the content. Placement of a quote doesn't imply that the quoted instructor wrote that section or doesn't have additional opinions on the details. Similarly, the lack of a quote does not imply that other instructors didn't provide similar suggestions.

Feedback

I hope this book continues to evolve as I hear from the *rokudan sensei* that I've missed, as we share what works, and work together to refine what we've learned. If you are an ASU instructor

that has received the *Ueshiba Juku* designation from Saotome Sensei and I haven't successfully contacted you, please know that it was not an intentional omission on my part and that I would love to include your recommendations as I update this handbook. If I have quoted you, but missed what you consider to be an important point, please correct me!

I apologize in advance for any errors and omissions. If any part of this handbook helped you on your test, please thank the next ASU *Ueshiba Juku* instructor you take a seminar from! I also love to hear when these words have been useful in helping somebody prepare for a stronger and more confident test. I also appreciate feedback in terms of what was particularly useful and what was counterproductive, to help me improve this handbook over time.

Email: guy@tampaaikido.com

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1302 North 15th Street, Suite #B
Tampa FL 33605

Acknowledgements

A special "thank you" is given to ASU's other *Ueshiba Juku* instructors for their advice and contributions. This handbook is based first and foremost on their knowledge and experience. I'd like to give additional thanks to Messores Sensei and Saotome Sensei for taking me on as their student. To Saotome Sensei and Patty for making me feel like family and for trusting me to make this handbook happen without offending everybody. And finally to my wife and best friend, Rebecca, for her support and understanding of the importance Aikido is in my life.

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