

TAEKWON-DO

a guide to get you from white to black
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An essay prepared by Hayden Breese for promotion to 3rd Degree

Introduction

Taekwon-Do is all about progression, growth and improvement at every level. As a system for self improvement it can provide the resources for an individual to reach their mental and physical potential. However, students are faced with a variety of challenges, many individuals still fail to reach their potential and the attrition rates in Taekwon-Do are very high.

The following report is a self help guide for students of Taekwon-Do at every level. It attempts to address some of the challenges of each belt rank and provide practical solutions to assist the student to overcome these challenges. Each practical solution is based on research¹ that explored the differences of different levels of overall time involved and belt rank in Taekwon-Do.

In addition, this report contains a guide for instructors. This guide provides tips that help instructors to understand the differences and challenges that students face at each stage in their training and provide effective strategies so that these challenges can be overcome.

The primary purpose of this document is to help students progress through each level so that they can reach their potential and become champions of Taekwon-Do.

¹ Participation Motivation in ITF/NZ Taekwon-Do and Strategic Marketing Management Report, 1999. Author: Hayden Breese

a guide for students of Taekwon-Do...

BEGINNING TAEKWON-DO

How to overcome the unknown and fear of failure

You turn up on your first night of training not knowing what to expect. You have probably seen an advertisement or have been encouraged by a friend, who is already involved with Taekwon-Do.

In the first training session you are exposed to a variety of new and exciting things, firstly everyone is wearing a white Do Bok, the training uniform of ITFNZ and a belt which identifies their rank.

Because you don't own a uniform you may feel as though you stick out like a sore thumb, relax, just about everyone at some point in the past started without a uniform. Other students will recognize that you are new and will come and introduce them-selves. This is an ideal way to meet new people.

One of the great things about learning Taekwon-Do is that each level gets gradually more challenging than the last. This means that you advance as you gradually improve, at a pace which suits you.

The instructor will sometimes use Korean, don't be put off by this, most instructors will use some Korean words in their commands. Generally though, many instructors will use English to describe techniques and will not expect you to understand Korean words until you have been taught their meaning.

Gradings occur three times a year. They help you to set new goals as your skills improve. If you are committed to learning and improvement, you will achieve your goals and advance in rank.

Building Confidence Step by Step

When you first start Taekwon-Do you may be surprised to discover that the 360 degrees flying triple kick, you once watched someone perform, is a little bit more difficult than you imagined.

While you may have some hefty aspirations in regard to your immediate ability, through continued training you will indeed begin to master techniques that you once considered amazing.

Don't be too hard on yourself if your arms and legs won't do exactly what you ask them to, give them time to adapt to the new demands that you are asking of them and they will continually improve.

If you are still worried about your ability to do Taekwon-Do, ask one of the other students about their experiences when they were a beginner. I am sure that they will tell you they found the techniques a little difficult at first.

BEGINNING TAEKWON-DO

Learning how to defend yourself

Some people have feelings of vulnerability after attending their first few Taekwon-Do classes because they begin to identify weaknesses in their ability to defend themselves. It is natural to feel this way and this feeling is a whole lot better than walking around thinking you are invincible, which one day may land you in a whole heap of trouble. Better to learn today, so that you can improve your capabilities, well in advance, should you one day have to defend yourself in a real life threatening situation.

Taekwon-Do is a disciplined martial art. This means that students are expected to act in accordance with the rules and commands issued by the instructor. This can take a bit of getting used to at first but after a while it's pretty easy. Be prepared to line up in rank at the start of class and return to these positions after different exercises during class. Because you are new, it means that you will need to "form up" with the rest of the new students. It is most likely that someone will show you what will happen and help you find where you need to be standing, before the start of class.

In addition to this, students are required to act with courtesy, respecting differences in age and rank. It is courteous to greet the instructor and other students when first arriving at the training hall (Do Jang) for example.

Ask Questions

Instructors love students who ask questions. As a beginning student of Taekwon-Do, you probably have a thousand questions. Don't be afraid to approach the instructor or one of the seniors with your questions; they are always willing to help. If you are having trouble with mastering a technique, ask for extra instruction.

TRAINING IN THE INTERMEDIATE BELTS

Enjoying training as a Green or Blue belt

Wow, so you made it to green belt, maybe even a blue belt. Well done! At this point you probably have made a great group of friends who do Taekwon-Do regularly. You are also developing some good techniques and improving rapidly.

This is a great time to try new things such as tournaments. It is also a great time to figure out what you really love about Taekwon-Do, whether it is patterns, breaking, sparring or something else.

If you are participating in Taekwon-Do for fitness reasons, consider the other benefits of Taekwon-Do such as an increasing ability to defend yourself and others.

Throughout your training you may find that your reasons for participating in Taekwon-Do are changing. This can be confusing but realize that with change, comes new and exciting challenges, new things to learn and new experiences.

Sometimes you go to training and your hearts not in it; this could be due to the influence of other areas of your life. While you may feel disheartened at your performance that night, realize that this training is only one of many trainings that you will have over a lifetime.

You probably find that you enjoy training when it is fun; although, training can't always be fun. There are times when it will be hard, painful and far from fun. Just remember that the greatest satisfaction comes from an achievement which you have worked hard for.

You may be starting to have some ideas on ways to make training interesting. You may be becoming interested in instructing and having your own club one day. Don't be afraid to share them with your instructor. I am sure that they will be interested in hearing your suggestions.

BECOMING A SENIOR STUDENT

Getting from Red to Black and becoming an Instructor

Every now and again a student reaches black belt and then ceases participation. One of the reasons for this is that they have failed to realize that training is a journey going far beyond black belt. In the Encyclopedia of Taekwon-Do, it states that first through to third degree is considered the novice stages of black belt. So don't get me wrong, you have made an excellent achievement by being awarded your black belt, just remember that there is always much more to learn.

The greatest challenge that you will face as a senior student of Taekwon-Do is the change in grading frequency. The three grading a year system becomes a one and a half, two, three or more year wait for your next black belt grading. If you are not a competitive person you should set yourself some intermediary goals that will help you stay focused towards your next grading. Speak to your instructor and agree on some goals.

As a senior student you may feel that sometimes there is a lot of pressure to know information and perform techniques. Just be aware that not everyone can know everything about Taekwon-Do and neither should they be expected too. In addition, if you cannot perform a technique as well as you think you should, at your level, don't give up. Stop and come to grips with the facts, yes you may not be able to do it yet, but with extra practice you will be able to improve your technique.

Do you sometimes find that class is not as exciting as you would like? Perhaps you find that line drills are repetitive and boring. If so, find an aspect of the exercise and relate it to an outcome. For example, consider that by doing this exercise you will be getting closer to achieving a goal or developing the ability to do something else. You feel bored only when you lack focus, find a way to focus on performing a technique or pattern for example. Pick something in the activity that you can control and vary it so that it becomes interesting. Ongoing boredom occurs when we lack goals to aim for. Even the most repetitive exercises become exciting when a definite goal is being targeted. So the next time you are feeling bored, have a think about what your current goals are or could be.

Become an Instructor!

You should consider being an instructor of your own club. These days there is plenty of support to start a club from scratch and begin to train your own students.

Starting your own club will open a new range of opportunities for you to develop your abilities in Taekwon-Do. It is also one of the most satisfying and rewarding aspects of training.

We rise and fall with our own expectations. Unfortunately, too many of us have been taught to live up to the lowly expectations awarded us from misguided advisors. As students we must seek to exceed all that is expected of us. More so, we must look within ourselves and set our own challenges. At the end of the day perhaps the greatest tests are the ones we set for ourselves.

a guide for Instructors of Taekwon-Do...

Leaders are people who inspire others to achieve. It is through accomplishment that we redefine our perception of ourselves, our capabilities and potential. The following is an instructor's guide - containing tips to manage the differences that exist in the mental requirements of students at different levels of Taekwon-Do experience.

INSTRUCTING TIPS FOR BEGINNERS

(White – Yellow)

Beginners need exercises that give them opportunities to develop self confidence. They are especially vulnerable to feelings of inadequacy in their ability to perform techniques and protect themselves in general. In this case, getting students to perform challenging exercises may in fact detriment their commitment to Taekwon-Do, as they find themselves with few opportunities to develop competence. While they may initially feel unconfident, lower social and personal expectations will work to balance things out; providing a foundation to grow self worth.

Provide plenty of opportunities for beginning students to practice their techniques . Students at this level will appreciate repetitive exercises more, because it provides an opportunity to perfect technique before advancing onto other exercises.

Find ways for the students to interact so that they can develop friendships; this will help them enjoy training more and work to maintain their commitment.

Devote extra one on one time to the beginning student and their abilities and confidence will increase much faster. If you do not have the time yourself, arrange for another senior student to spend time with the beginning student.

Beginning students are more vulnerable to the influence of other activities in their lives. They are generally the youngest group of Taekwon-Do participants, and face a time of great change in their lives. While this is difficult to manage, you can help your students to overcome the influences of other commitments by being flexible and providing ways for them to continue their training outside of normal class times. This will help to keep the habit of training up and reduce feelings of having to catch up when they return to normal attendance.

Set realistic and attainable goals for beginning students and concentrate on communicating what your expectations are and how they can be achieved.

Avoid placing beginning students in pressure situations where they can feel embarrassed in front of others.

Beginning students love fitness activities , so keep them physically active as much as possible.

TRAINING THE INTERMEDIATE BELTS

Enjoy fun training's with the Green or Blue belts

Students at this level generally do Taekwon-Do because they simply enjoy it. They are still developing the reasons why they participate. They do not have the pressure expectations of the senior belts and have begun to develop competency in a range of techniques.

In order to help this intermediate level progress to become seniors, an instructor must spend time getting to know what makes the Taekwon-Do experience enjoyable for each student.

Spend more time doing fun activities with this group. They do not require the same level of repetition as the beginners.

Green and Blue Belts have created many of the interpersonal ties that will bind them throughout their career in Taekwon-Do.

Students by this stage have demonstrated discipline and an investment in progression. Introduce humor and tweak dull exercises so that they are more fun.

Vary training exercises for intermediate students. They will be beginning to notice repetition at this stage.

Don't forget that Intermediate students need just as much encouragement as the beginning students

HELPING STUDENTS TO BECOME INSTRUCTORS

Training Red and Black Belts

While perceptions of competence are important to beginning students – senior students consider it very important. They not only compare their own level of ability with their pairs but also all the ranks below their own.

The Taekwon-Do student compares themselves to others and is confronted with a state of continual evaluation by others. This can result in considerable performance anxiety that can ultimately lead the student to withdraw from participation. While there are a variety of complicated internal and external factors that affect a student's ongoing participation, it is this social feedback that plays a considerable role in perceptions of competence.

As an instructor be careful how you challenge a senior student who is lacking self confidence. It is these greater expectations to perform that can become very difficult to manage for the senior student. If you find situations where the expectations on the senior students are possibly becoming too much, emphasize improvement in their ability. For example, create exercises that do not provide opportunities for students to compare their abilities to others, especially of a lower rank. In addition, create exercises that enable the student to demonstrate their strengths, so that they may regain confidence and begin to readdress their weaknesses from a stronger mental position.

Senior students feel less vulnerable and more in control of their environment, and actions than other students. This is the time where the instructor should really begin to challenge the student to mature.

Focus on performance relative to self and improving one's skills.

The senior student, who has invested a great deal of time in Taekwon-Do, has developed greater needs for affiliation. What this means is that the people they have spent time with have become one of the major reasons they continue to participate. Create exercises and activities inside and outside Taekwon-Do that satisfy this need and you will keep your senior students coming back for more.

This need for affiliation must be managed so that the student does not give up because a significant friend gives up. If you lose a senior member for whatever reason, spend more time focusing on their remaining pairs, practicing exercises and activities that they specifically enjoy and quickly providing ways for them to re-establish their ties with other senior students.

Large groups may detriment the development of the senior students' abilities due to boredom and the ability to simply become one of the crowd. As an instructor, have you ever noticed your senior students simply going through the motions in a zombie like state during class? If you see this take steps to reduce the size of your group exercises and directly address the individual performance of your students.

Variation is the key to keep senior students involved and inspired in Taekwon-Do. Variation works directly against boredom. Look for ways to continually vary your classes with new exercises or old exercises performed in new ways. Seek out ideas from other instructors or invite different instructors to take your trainings from time to time.

Because the reward schedule is very drawn out for senior belts at black belt level, instructors should find ways to create other intermediate goals for students. Try not to reduce your encouragement to master new techniques and learn new skills.

Teaching senior students new things is very important. Although the senior student has assumed more responsibility for their own training, by this stage, it is important that instructors continue to play an active teaching role.

Encourage and motivate seniors. They have significant reasons to doubt themselves, such as ever increasing degrees of difficulty and comparison expectations. They need to be reminded that what they are doing is good and recognized.

If your student is beginning to exceed your ability to teach them, let them go. You can refer them to another instructor or even better, encourage them to start their own club.

As instructors, leaders and teachers, the least we can do for our students is to see the potential that lies in everyone, even when it seems there is none. And to find the same potential within ourselves in whatever form and nurture it until it grows.