

Kendo at the University of Michigan FAQ (ver. 1.05)

What is Kendo?

- Kendo is a Japanese martial art which literally translates to “The Way of the Sword”. It is one of the three modern sword arts practiced in Japan today, and focuses primarily on how to wield a sword against another sword wielding opponent.

Where are practices?

- The Kendo Club at the University of Michigan meets at the CCRB (Central Campus Recreational Building) Dance room (3275) on Central Campus.

When are practices?

- For the Fall 2007 semester, our practices are Saturdays from 8:30 AM to 10:00. The CCRB opens at 8:00 AM, and we advise everyone to arrive well before 8:30.

How much does it cost to join?

- Since we are a student organization, traditionally the students administer and run the club as a joint responsibility. We are asking this semester that student members contribute \$35 in membership fees to help pay for our practice space from the university. Checks are the easiest for us to accept, but we can take cash. Please make checks out to “Kendo Club” and give it to the club treasurer.

- The university requires that all non-students purchase access to the recreational facility. Information regarding memberships can be found at any of the Business Offices of Rec Sports at the CCRB/NCRB or IMRB. More information can be found at: (<http://www.recsports.umich.edu/members/purchase.html>)

I’m a community member and it says that I need to get a sponsor.

How do I do that?

- Ask any of our club members who are university affiliates (faculty, staff, students or alumni). There is no limit to the number of people an affiliate can sponsor, but the sponsor will have to be there with you when you first purchase your membership. The other option is to have the sponsor’s M-Card and a letter stating that the affiliate is sponsoring you, at the time you purchase your membership.

What is the stuff you guys wear?

- The armor collectively is called “bogu”, and the 2 piece uniform we wear under it is called the “keiko-gi” and the bottom is called a “hakama”.

Do I need to buy any equipment?

- Not right away. Like many sports, it is dependent on how much time you want to put into training. The more often you train, the faster you will advance. To learn the basics, you do not need the armor (bogu). For the first practices all you will need is clothing that allows you freedom of movement.

- As you progress as a beginner, you will probably want to purchase your own bamboo sword (shinai) and a uniform.

Isn't bogu expensive?

- Bogu comes in a very wide range of prices, and its price depends on many things like its country of manufacture, the amount of work done by hand, level of customization, and the quality of materials used in its construction. New beginner sets can be found online from around \$300-400 dollars and up.

- Beginners are not encouraged to purchase equipment until they are recommended to. This is for a variety of reasons, one being safety. There is **not** a direct correlation between price and quality. For example, bogu made for advanced users is lighter to increase performance but also assumes that the wearer can more actively avoid strong hits, and often offers less protection.

Do you use real swords?

- Kendo uses three different types of swords for practice. The bamboo sword (shinai) is used during competition practice, while a wooden or metal sword is used during forms practice.

Do you use belts?

- Like many other Japanese martial arts we use a kyu/dan ranking system, with 10 kyu ranks and 10 dan ranks. Although dan ranks are considered "black belts", kendoists do not wear belts or any other outward sign of ranking.

How long will it take to get my blackbelt?

- That will depend on you. After you develop an acceptable level of safety and competence, which may take months, you will be directed to test by the instructor. For people entering Kendo with no previous experience, this first test establishes their ranking. Most ranks below Dan/Black belt can be tested for up to twice a year with permission from the head instructor. No one tests directly for Dan/Black belt.

I have no experience, nor am I really physically fit. Will that be a problem?

- Kendo does not have any distinctions between young or old, men or women, athletic or not. It is self-paced and you set the pace for how fast or comfortable you are with your training. You will find your physical limitations challenged in what may seem as awkward and new, but you will make the final decision as to what you can do.

I have a high ranking belt in another martial art. Can I jump ranks?

- Although many martial arts share some of the same or similar fundamentals, this is not a license to consider them as the same. So even if you are the all powerful, all knowing super grand master of (insert martial art here), you will start at a similar introduction level in Kendo. How long you stay at that level is up to you and your dedication.

Will previous training hinder me?

- Previous experience is not a hindrance, not having an open mind to a different perspective could be... If you have learned Kumdo, Iaido, or Kenjitsu there will be many similarities – and that is helpful for some people, but there will also be many differences. Keep an open mind to these differences and give them the same respect as your previous experience and you will go far in Kendo and in life.

Do I need to be able to ... Japanese ?

- Although Japanese is used for Kendo, practices are taught in English. As you become more familiar with the Japanese terms, you will find that they are easier to use than English. We will help you with each step you take. We also have resources to assist you outside of practice.

Do you guys compete?

- Yes, kendo is a martial art with a competition component. Our club members, and our sister club at Eastern Michigan University actively compete in two or three tournaments a year.

Doesn't getting hit hurt?

- Although the armor that we wear is light, it provides excellent protection. On occasion if your opponent misses the target area, it can sting a little. There are additional pads that can be purchased and worn for your comfort level as you deem necessary.

It looks dangerous, will I get injured?

- As with any sport or activity there is some level of risk involved, however, since kendoists are generally more protected than other arts such as judo or karate, injuries are actually quite rare. There is generally a greater concern that one will hurt themselves by not stretching sufficiently than actually participating in Kendo.

Please reference our website for additional information and assistance at <http://www.umich.edu/~umkendo>