

My Judo Promotion

In the North Star Judo Rank Grading System

Judo rank promotion is a mysterious process. Every martial art has its own criteria, and every school within an art adds its variations. The system we use at North Star Judo endeavors to bring the best benefits of belt ranking to you. You will see the following objectives reflected in the answers to the questions.

Our objectives

- Establish benchmarks for progress.
- Provide motivational goals.
- Give belt ranks that are universally acceptable outside our school.
- Give students and sensei within our own system a way to identify the level of the individuals with whom we all learn and train.
- Create an environment for self challenge.
- Use the ranking system to establish a stronger and more functional judo learning environment.
- Create a functional system of progress from the beginner level (*kyu* grades) to the advanced (*dan* grades).
- To make the dan grades achievable, reachable within a reasonable time, sought after by the student and seen as the beginning of the significant learning of judo.

FAQ

These questions are a compilation of contributions from actual current judoka at North Star, solicited via e-mail. Some have been reworded and edited into similar questions. These contributions were of great value, and we thank all for their assistance.

How do I know if I'm ready to test?

You can use the Student Waza Check List included herein to make a general estimation of how far along you've come. If you have the requisite number of waza, the time-in-grade, and the other criteria, such as kata, counters and combinations in place, you might be there. The *Basics of Judo* binder version also has rank criteria for your first belt rank.

Is it okay to ask my sensei if I'm ready?

In some martial arts schools, the students are required to wait until they are told they are ready. Although we understand the reasons for this, it is not the way we do it. If you feel ready, after taking a strong look at the criteria, please broach the subject with your North Star sensei.

What if the sensei says I'm not ready?

You're not ready. However, this will be a good time to do an evaluation of where you are in your progress, what you might do to better prepare yourself, and get a sense of the timeframe.

What if sensei comes to me with a request that I begin moving up?

Some people are reluctant to test, for a variety of reasons. Judo ranks and the testing process help create a better student and a better school, and they are an integral part of the entire program. If your sensei suggests you move up, reluctance is not considered a sign of modesty. You should seriously consider doing so.

How does North Star determine rank criteria?

That is a tough one. We initially created our first rank system back in 1985, when North Star was founded. We came from strongly traditional judo

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backgrounds. Our goal was to assure that our students, emerging from this new and somewhat “upstart” school, were as good, *no... better*, than any others being locally or nationally produced. In retrospect, our students now tell us we achieved that, and at all levels of belt grade.

Our emphasis was on sound basics, judo fundamentals, and judo as we believed founder Jigoro Kano intended.

Michelle Holtze and Tom Crone have been member of the Standards Committee for Judo Minnesota for decades, are Master Rank Examiner Certified with the United States Judo Association, and Michelle is on their national Promotion Board. The point is not to brag, but that a great deal of promotion criteria creation and use lies at the base of experience they bring to their own program.

When can I practice throws and kata that I need to master for the next promotion outside of structured class?

If you have a Warrior’s Cove full membership (beyond the judo-only one), there are open practice times at all locations. You need to get permission to use the space and time from the Warrior’s Cove instructor in charge. This is not an “open randori” time, and is primarily intended for BJJ and Shinbudo. You could also ask your sensei if you and your partner could work on test criteria during regular class time, separate from the group activities. Sometimes, your senseis will have other open judo practice times scheduled and will let you know.

If I signed up to have belt promotion costs automatically drawn off my credit card through Warrior's Cove, would this also work with the Judo promotion / testing fees?

Sorry, but no. North Star fees are separate. Payment is by check or cash. We do not process credit cards.

Does competition time play a role in promotions?

Yes and no. You never have to compete to fulfill testing criteria. However, the three fundamental ways in which a judoka’s overall upgrading is determined are: 1) Technical skills 2) Proficiency in Contest 3) Contribution to judo. Contest proficiency is not so much about winning as it is about how the judoka used that experience to better their judo and that of others. We recommend contest for that reason, and feel you will better achieve your grasp of judo if you have that in place. If you do not want to compete, you should still attend some shiai, and even volunteer to work the scoring and timing tables. Refereeing is also credited at more advanced levels. Judo is martial art based, and contest provides a fuller appreciation of it.

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What about the other two criteria? What are they?

Technical skills are the various techniques of judo. This is about both quantity and quality. The quantity part is the needing to be able to demonstrate more skills. The quality part is about being able to show both how each skill is "judo" based, and in putting the skills together in combination and counter moves to make judo more practical and effective.

Contribution to judo can range from helping new students learn to fall, when requested, to working tables at a shiai, or participating in a judo demo.

You don't follow a specific teaching syllabus in class or between schools. Can I make substitutions for techniques required per rank, or do I have to use the specific ones in the rank requirements?

You may substitute, but must indicate what those will be prior to testing and have sensei permission. If you have had experience and teaching input on the techniques required, it is best to use them, unless they are truly in an early stage of development.

We may in the future have a combination requirement system, in which you can either use a "Specific Waza" or a "Minimum of Waza per Category" Criteria. It will be self-explanatory.

How Formal is the test?

The judoka testing is always best served by treating the test as formal. While examiners may make humorous remarks, the student should not. There are testing protocols that should be followed.

What are the testing protocols?

You will be told again when the test begins. Here are a few.

1. Throw front throws beginning with tori's back to the board.
2. Do sweeping techniques so that the active leg is toward the board.
3. Do hold downs so that uke's head is toward the board.
4. Demonstrate all techniques so as best to show the working parts.
5. Do not allow uke to make moves or take postures that "give away" the asked for technique; on the other hand, tori may instruct uke as to how to move or position.
6. Do not ask if you can repeat a skill. If asked to do so, don't worry.
7. Regardless of your off the mat relationship with the senseis, on the mat you should in all cases refer to them as sensei. Often "Mr." or "Ms" is acceptable. "Sensei" is always right. This applies to the testing process.

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8. If you are asked a question or to perform anything, and you do not know the response, simply say so. Do not fake it or guess. Ukes should be very careful not to endeavor to aid the tester at these times.

Is it possible to fail my test?

It is almost impossible to fail your test. Your senseis know you and your abilities. You would not be testing if you could not pass. We tell students to look at the test as an opportunity to showcase their judo. If a student is for some reason having a difficult time, to the point of the test being close to a failure level, we might ask them to discontinue and reschedule. The last thing we want is for students to be embarrassed or humiliated.

How good do the skills demonstrated have to be to qualify for promotion?

All your skill demonstration should be very good. Your primary objective is to always realize that the techniques must show how judo works. Style points are secondary. The better you do the primary, the better the techniques will look.

At the risk of redundancy - - The main thing is to demonstrate not only the techniques, but also the way in which the techniques adhere to the principles of judo. We are not so much interested in "a throw" as in seeing judo used to create a throw. If you do a skill and it has less quality to it than we know you are capable of, we might ask to see it again. To give a comparison to "testing" you are familiar with, you can get through it all with a "C" level performance. We won't want to see "D", but you won't likely be testing if you are at that level.

Everybody wants to do better than "C", of course. As you get into your upper grade testing, we will raise the bar on what constitutes excellence and its related standards.

How much time in between tests (time-in-grade) should there be?

This is not chiseled in stone. Your first test, for yellow belt, could take anywhere from six weeks to six months. This first test is about basics and history and terminology. For example, students taking the credit class at the University of Minnesota spend a full semester, some twenty two fifty minute classes, to cover enough material so that they would be close to ready for their yellow belt (gokyu). They also have taken a mid-term and a final that require strong familiarity with history and terminology. So, in about three months, they accomplish that level.

Three months time-in-grade between the pre-black belt ranks, up to and including black belt, contingent on regular practice (minimum of twice weekly), would be possible.

Taking longer is acceptable, sometimes mandatory. Life happens. Some

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people either require longer to attain the skills, or they prefer to take more time.

How do performance expectations change as we move up in rank?

You will be asked to do three things of added dimension.

1. Demonstrate single techniques from walking rather than standing still.
2. Demonstrate more combination and counter techniques. These may include the specific criteria for the specific test level, and possibly eliminate the need to do them singularly. The same is true of both standing and matwork skills,
3. You will be expected to show how you make your judo work.

Sometimes, people come to North Star with previous judo experience, ranks, and sometimes have even been inactive for some time. How do you deal with those ranks?

This is a case-by-case situation. Unless someone's rank is ludicrously off, we will accept rank that comes to us from elsewhere on its own merits. That said, we will tell these people, "Your rank is fine as it stands. Here is our specific criteria. When it is time for your next level, understand that all North Star requirements will be necessary for consideration of promotion."

If a person comes to us with a high dan grade (black belt), and it seems to be higher than the skill and knowledge required, we will ask for certification or for a sensei's name so that we can personally verify previous promotion.

Sometimes, people who have not done judo for a considerable period, say were active in their youth, then took fifteen years off to establish a career and begin a family, will want to wear a white belt. We do not permit this, although we appreciate the concept. We will do a personal diagnostic, if required, and determine a rank for this person. Or, we will say, "Wear your rank and grow back into it."

We do not want people on the mat with skills of a sankyu, for instance, who are wearing a white belt.

Can a person be demoted?

No. Ranks are permanent. (This is another reason why people can't decide to wear a white belt if they have been ranked higher earlier in their career. If senseis cannot demote, students certainly cannot.)

There is an application for the USJA in my judo binder behind the material related to rank promotion. Criteria is determined at the school/dojo level, as I understand, right? Is there a relationship be-

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tween the national organizations and local testing for promotions?

North Star accepts membership and rank from the United States Judo Association (USJA), the USJI (U S A Judo), the USJF (United States Judo Federation). All of these organizations have different criteria for rank. It is also very similar. North Star's current national activity is with the USJA.

Many judo schools use USJA criteria at all promotion levels. They have a good syllabus. North Star prefers to create its own syllabus up to *shodan*.

Once you reach *shodan*, we recommend you register your rank with the national association of your choice. There is supposed to be reciprocity between all the national organizations. Political relations have not always afforded it.

How often are the promotions held and where are they held?

We endeavor to hold promotions about every eight to ten weeks. Sometimes, we do not have students who are ready, and we will push the timeline out farther. We will put that information in our Bulletins, which we e-mail and post on locker room bulletin boards.

The tests are usually on a Sunday afternoon. We try to either rotate between the various schools, or choose a school most convenient to the preponderance of testers. We need to pre-schedule these times with Warrior's Cove.

When several people test for the same rank at the same time who sits ahead in class, the person who had the belt tied on before you, or you if you had more time -in - grade before the test than the person who was belted first?

First belted, highest rank. Time-in-grade is a per-rank situation. We take previous time-in-grade into consideration when we adjourn to deliberate during the test process, prior to awarding belts. We sometimes make comment during the belting process about how we are determining seniority, should special considerations be required.

Who is present for the promotion?

The students testing, the senseis on the promotion board for the day, and, a bunch of other possible people. They are:

- Parents, spouses, significant others, friends and family.
- Other judoka from the school who want to observe testing.
- Instructors from other schools, usually promotion board members, whom we would like to "introduce" to our higher ranking students. (Often, this happens at *shodan*.)

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Should I set my sights on black belt early on?

If you mean 1st degree black belt, yes and no. Too many see that rank as an ultimate objective. It is not. It is instead the point at which you are truly no longer a novice. You are in possession of knowledge and ability which will serve you in learning advanced, expert judo.

You should see the first degree black belt as a doorway through which you wish to pass so that you can enter a new realm of learning. It is not a point of arrival, so much as a point of new departure. Set your ambitions on it, and beyond.

What is the youngest rank at which a person can attain black belt?

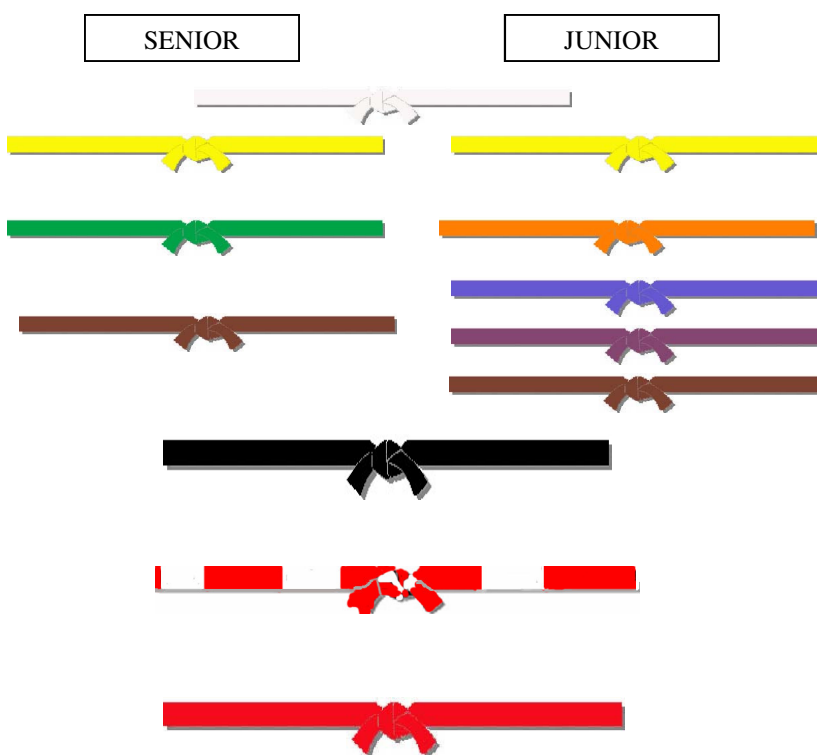
We have determined that fifteen is the youngest possible black belt age, and that would be the exception. We prefer seventeen. *Shodan* requires a certain degree of maturity which also implies a certain amount of personal life experience and growth. Although some youth may start with us at a young age, thereby attaining a level just below *shodan* a couple of years before the age of majority for that rank, the required maturity also implies patience and perseverance.

What does a person have to do to reach the higher black belt levels?

As judokas advance in the black belt (dan grade), ranks the criteria becomes individualized. Obviously, as many reach a certain age level, the inclination and desire to compete diminish, as does the physical ability to demonstrate certain skills. At these levels, contribution to the sport, via coaching, teaching, refereeing, and a variety of options, as well as more kata work, more improvement in areas of specialization, and on-going service add to the mix. There are many physical skills to be added between 1st and 5th *dan*.

Also, ranks are not so much achieved at any level as grown into. The meaning of this becomes clearer once the opportunity is present. Once you arrive at 2nd *dan*, revisit the question.

<p><u>6TH KYU</u> WHITE = <i>ROKKYU</i></p> <p><u>5TH KYU</u> YELLOW = <i>GOKYU</i></p> <p><u>4TH KYU</u> GREEN / ORANGE = <i>YONKYU</i></p> <p><u>3RD KYU, 2ND KYU, 1ST KYU</u> <i>SANKYU, NIKYU, IKKYU</i> BROWN FOR SENIORS BLUE, PURPLE, BROWN - JRS.</p> <p><u>1ST DAN - 10TH DAN</u> <i>SHODAN, NIDAN, ETC.</i> BLACK</p> <p><u>6TH, 7TH, 8TH DAN</u> <i>ROKUDAN, SHICHIDAN, HACHIDAN</i> RED AND WHITE OPTION</p> <p><u>9TH & 10TH DAN</u> <i>KUDAN, JUDAN</i> RED</p>
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Don't be afraid to ask...

If you have more questions, ask your *sensei*, or send an e-mail. Higher ranking students may have answers, too, and can share their promotion experiences with you. Keep in mind that they can be helpful, but are not the final authority.

1985 North Star Promotion Criteria - Rokkyu through Shodan (Pages 10 and 11)

	Gokyu	Yonkyu		Sankyu	
	<u>Techniques</u>	<u>Techniques</u>	<u>Nage No Kata</u>	<u>Techniques</u>	<u>Nage No Kata</u>
NAGE WAZA Tachi waza Te waza (hand techniques) Koshi waza (hip techniques) Ashi waza (leg/foot techniques)	Ippon seoi nage Tai otoshi		Uki otoshi Ippon seoi nage Kata guruma	Morote seoi nage	FIRST SET AND
	O goshi Uki goshi	Koshi guruma Harai goshi		Tsuri goshi Hane goshi	Uki goshi Harai goshi Tsurikomi goshi
	Ko uchi gari O soto gari Okuri ashi barai	O uchi gari Uchi mata De ashi barai		Harai tsuri komi ashi Ashi guruma Ko soto gari	
		Tomoe nage			
Sutemi waza Ma sutemi waza (back sacrifice techniques) Yoko sutemi waza (side sacrifice techniques)	Uki waza			Yoko otoshi	
NE WAZA Katame waza Osaekomi waza (holding techniques) Shime waza (choking techniques) Kansetsu waza (joint locking techniques)	Kesa gatame Kata gatame Kami shiho gatame Yoko shiho gatame	Tate shiho gatame		Mune gatame Ushiro kesa gatame Kuzure kami shiho gatame Kuzure tate shiho gatame Kuzure yoko shiho gatame	
				Ude jime Gyaku juji jime Kataha jime	
				Ude gatame (2) Ude garami (2)	
OTHER ITEMS	Quarter Nelson Half Nelson Belt Nelson Tsumura Turnover	Two Turnovers		Combinations	
		Two Escapes		Counters	
	Koho ukemi Sokuho ukemi Zempo ukemi Zempo kaiten ukemi	Three Combinations			
		Three Counters			
	History and Terminology				

Nikyu		Ikkyu		Shodan	
Techniques	Nage No Kata	Techniques	Nage No Kata	Techniques	Nage No Kata
Sukui nage	FIRST SET	Sumi otoshi	FIRST SET	ALL PREVIOUS TECHNIQUES AND AN ADDITIONAL EIGHT NAGE WAZA*	FIRST SET
Utsuri goshi	SECOND SET AND	Ushiro goshi	SECOND SET		SECOND SET
O guruma Ko soto gake	Okuri ashi barai Sasae tsurikomi ashi Uchi mata	O soto guruma Hiza guruma	THIRD SET AND		THIRD SET
			Tomoe nage Ura nage Sumi gaeshi		FOURTH SET AND
Hane makikomi Soto makikomi Tani otoshi		Yoko wakare Yoko guruma			Yoko gake Yoko guruma Uki waza
	<u>Katame No Kata</u>		<u>Katame No Kata</u>		<u>Katame No Kata</u>
Ura kesa gatame	Kuzure kesa gatame Kata gatame Kami shiho gatame Yoko shiho gatame Kuzure kami shiho gatame		FIRST SET AND	Ne Waza Counters & Combinations	FIRST SET
Waki jime Nami juji jime Kata juji jime Okuri eri jime Sankaku jime		Jigoku jime Sode guruma jime Tsukome jime	Kata juji jime Hadaka jime Okuri eri jime Kataha jime Gyaku juji jime		SECOND SET AND
Waki gatame Gatame (2) Ude garami (3)		Hiza gatame Garami (4)			Ude garami Ude hishigi juji gatame Ude hishigi ude gatame Ude hishigi hiza gatame Ashi garami
Combinations		Combinations			*See the Gokyo no waza(s) "old 40 and new"
Counters		Counters			Complexities of: Counters and Combinations Shodan Essay And Much More!

NAGE WAZA	Te	Koshi	Ashi	Ma	Yoko			Nage Totals	
								NEW	TOTAL
Gokyu	2	2	3	0	1			8	8
Yonkyu	0	2	3	1	0			6	14
Sankyu	1	2	3	0	1			7	21
Nikyu	1	1	2	0	3			7	28
Ikkyu	1	1	2	0	5			9	37
TOTAL Pre Shodan	5	8	13	1	10				37
Shodan	3	1						4	41
1D TOTAL	8	9	13	1	10				41

NE WAZA	Osae	Shime	Kan-setsu	Turn Overs		Ne Totals	
						NEW	TOTAL
Gokyu	4	0	0	4		8	8
Yonkyu	1	0	0	0		1	9
Sankyu	5	3	2	0		10	19
Nikyu	1	5	3	5		14	33
Ikkyu	0	3	1	4		8	41
Pre Shodan	11	11	6	13			41
Shodan	1	2	2	1		6	47
TOTAL	12	13	8	14			47

Kata Criteria

SET	Gokyu	Yonkyu	Sankyu	Nikyu	Ikkyu	Shodan
1st		Nage	Nage	Nage / Katame	Nage / Katame	Nage / Katame
2nd			Nage	Nage	Nage / Katame	Nage / Katame
3rd				Nage	Nage	Nage / Katame
4th					Nage	Nage
5th						Nage