

v2016-8-12

VWA Guidelines for Basic Dojo Manners

The following lists (A, B, and C) are mostly common sense items which require no or little explanation and provide the basis for VWA members' understanding and practice of dojo etiquette.

These lists (A, B, and C) will be posted at the dojo, and may be read out to members occasionally for the purpose of articulating, reinforcing and maintaining members' common understanding of the dojo etiquette.

The instructor of each class, members of the instructional committee, and all senior members are expected to promote these manners among junior members and exemplify such manners in their own conduct and way of engaging in Aikido training at the dojo.

A. Before Class

1. Make every effort to be at the dojo before the class starts.
2. Do not change clothes in the hallway. Change clothes in the changing room.
3. Put your hakama on before the class starts. If you come late, do so before you step on the mats.
4. Turn off your cellphone. (There are exceptional cases when this directive does not apply.)
5. Sit in line five minutes before the class starts and adjust your posture and breathing. Abstain from private conversations once you sit in line.
6. Start mediating in absolute silence three minutes before the class starts.
7. Line up according to rank.
8. If you step on the mats late while others have already lined up, sit in the second row.
9. A senior member must adjust the position of the weapons on the rack in the alter ("shinza" or sacred place in Japanese) if needed.
10. If you are late for class and miss the warm-ups, do your own in the hall way first. Get on the mats and sit close to the end of the mats quietly and wait for the Sensei's or a senior member's invitation to join the class.
11. Someone should fill the bucket with water and a bit of vinegar for washing the mats after class.

B. During Class

1. Follow the appropriate bowing protocol. Junior students need to observe senior students to learn the protocol.
2. Do warm-ups in unison; follow the instructor's sequence and timing and emulate the movements as closely as possible.
3. Should you have physical limitations or difficulties, you are allowed to make necessary adjustments to avoid re-injury or aggravation.
4. Although Aikido is a martial art, practice must be kept safe for everyone in the dojo. Robust practice should only be engaged by mutual consent of partners. Caution must reign. Senior members who observe overly robust practice or a partner looking uncomfortable must intervene to stop the continuation or escalation of inappropriate or unsafe practice. Alternatively, the senior member should request the instructor's attention for immediate intervention.
5. If a member feels a partner's practice is too harsh, they should ask the partner to lighten up and be more careful. Aikido training should be safe and enjoyable. They may also speak to the instructor, or wait out from the practice set, depending on what they feel is appropriate. Instructors are to remind members to be cautious and respectful of others and to stop any harsh or overly robust practice. Complaints may be addressed to Liz McKinlay, Deputy Dojo-cho at any time.
6. Keep verbalizations to a minimum. Do not engage in conversations more than necessary. Practice should be done silently and intensely, except when you are making vocalizations ("kake-goe" in Japanese) while doing throws or delivering attacks.
7. When you must stop your practice and step off the mats during class for any reason, let your partner and the instructor know. If the instructor is occupied, let one of the senior members know that you have to step off the mats temporarily.
8. If your partner or a junior member has to leave class or step off the mats for an unknown reason, please let the instructor or a senior member know this. When judged necessary, a senior member will follow up on such an incident to ensure the well-being of the student.
9. Do a standing bow to the front when you are temporarily leaving and re-entering the dojo.
10. You are allowed to step off the mats during the class to put on a bandage, to get a cleaning towel to wipe off stains on the mats, or have a quick drink of water when necessary. Let your partner know this and bow off as you leave the mats. When returning to practice, bow to the front and to the partner and join the practice.
11. The instructor in charge of any given class should be called "sensei" and not by his/her first name. Senior members must honour a fellow member teaching the class by

following this etiquette and adhering to his/her instructions. The instructor in charge has the ultimate responsibility for conducting the class in all respects and correcting students in class. Senior members are expected to help him/her fulfill this responsibility. Do not engage in extensive teaching if you are not the designated instructor.

12. Joking and laughing during the practice are considered inappropriate and should be avoided, as should conversations.
13. You must follow the proper bowing protocol throughout the class. Bowing must be done sincerely with a clear intention to convey respect to the other person.
14. When your uniform or belt need adjusting, do this at the rear of the dojo. Do this, if possible, in a kneeling or sitting position facing the back. Then bow to the front and the partner and join the practice.
15. Senior members working with junior members must offer help but avoid prolong and loud talking. Whenever possible, use silent or quiet communication modes. No one's voice should be heard across the dojo, except the instructor's, during the class.
16. Junior members should not offer suggestions to senior members during practice; though they may ask questions after practice.
17. When visitors or observers show up during the class, one of the senior members must approach them and deal with the visitors regarding welcome, introductions, paperwork, permission to watch or practice.
18. When you need to rest and stop practicing temporarily, you are free to do so. Let your partner and the instructor know this. Sit in the corner to avoid being in the way of other practitioners and find a safe place away from the "landing path."
19. While resting from physical practice, engage in observational learning ("mitori-geiko" in Japanese).
20. Members must alternate the role of video-recording the Chief Instructor's class rather than one practitioner being responsible for this task throughout the class.
21. Chewing gum or eating food on the mats and during practice is prohibited, except when the dojo space is used for social events.

C. After Class

1. Consider that all activities, interactions, and personal conduct in the dojo even after class is an extension of the class and the expression of your attitude toward Aikido training. This includes expressions of your respect toward senior dojo members.
2. Dojo cleaning is everyone's responsibility. After class, members quickly assume different roles for dojo cleaning. Save private conversations and additional practice until this is over. Senior members will act as role models in this regard even after class.
3. If you must leave the dojo immediately after class, you may do so. Let one of the senior members know that you must leave.
4. Follow the appropriate cleaning protocol and the use of a different cloth for cleaning the shrine and weapons. Do not mix the cleaning cloth used for wiping the dirty cement floor or the dusty wooden floor with the cloth used for wiping the tatami mats (where your face may touch during practice).
5. Wiping the mats should be done thoroughly and effectively for the purpose of removing dirt and sweat of the surface and the space between the ridges of the mats. Light and superficial wiping does not serve the purpose of cleaning the mats.
6. Do not undress or change in the dojo or hallway. Do so in the changing room.
7. Free practice after class is encouraged. A senior member must be around to ensure safety and offer instructional help when requested.
8. A senior member or the instructor must lock up the dojo and ensure all lights and fans are turned off.
9. A dojo officer is to remove cash and other payments before the dojo is closed.
10. Follow the appropriate bowing protocol when leaving the dojo, both in sitting and standing positions. Bowing is considered a sacred act. Never bow while talking. Avoid doing a shallow and superficial bow. Do not bow and turn away at the same time; face the other person and bow sincerely and wholeheartedly.
11. Do not practise forms of other martial arts or related exercises unless you are given permission by the instructor first.
12. Go to the rear corner or near the end of the mats if you need to engage in a social conversation, give or receive massage, or do stretching or relaxation exercise after class. Do not do the above in the middle of the dojo. Do not talk loudly in the dojo.
13. Wash your keigogi at the end of every day's practice so that you start the next day's practice with a clean keigogi.