

Proposal for Iaido Distance Gradings

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Abstract

In many martial arts grading acts as a motivator for new practitioners, however, due to the high costs of grading in Iaido in Canada this may not always be the case. Due to the geographical size of Canada, and the rarity of Iaido practitioners outside of the focal points of Vancouver and Toronto, grading can be cost prohibitive. By creating Distance Gradings for lower level Iaidoka it will be possible to return gradings to a motivator instead of a deterrent for people considering joining Iaido in Canada.

Problem: Grading in Canada

Geography

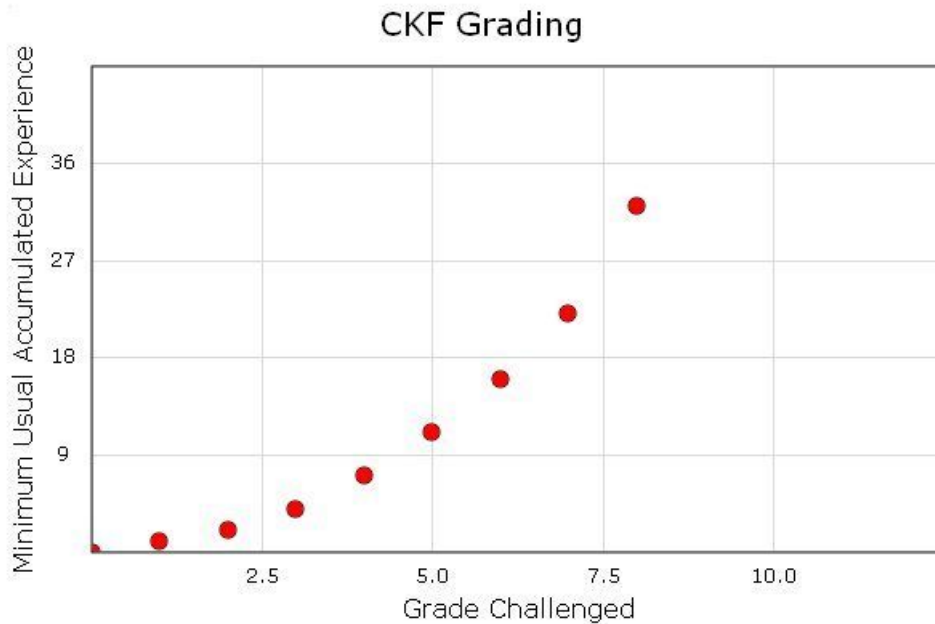
Canada is the second largest country in the world, covering an enormous area of almost 10 million square kilometres. Iaido gradings are held in the Greater Vancouver Area or Central Ontario (where the majority of Iaido practitioners reside). These two locations are nearly 3500 km apart (as the crow flies) and significantly longer by road. Because of this, practitioners in other areas may easily need to travel up to 2000 km to grade.

Quantity of Gradings

The way gradings are set up under the ZNKR, practitioners are eligible to challenge more tests in the first years of training. After eight years of training practitioners will have already been eligible for five tests (assuming they passed them all on the first attempt), while in the rest of their Iaido careers (which could be decades long) they are only eligible for another four (see Figure 1: Years Experience vs. Grade Challenged (Kim Taylor)). If practitioners do not pass their tests on the first attempt then they will need to re-test at a later date.

Each time a practitioner tests they will be required to travel to a designated testing centre either in the Greater Vancouver Area, or in the Greater Toronto Area.

Figure
1: Years



Experience vs. Grade Challenged (Kim Taylor)

Grading Costs

Typical grading costs for laidoka in remote locations include travel expenses, accommodation, food, and potentially, time off work for travel, as well as grading expenses. Each practitioner will need to find their own cheapest method of attending the grading. While a flight may reduce time, air travel is expensive, money could be saved by taking a bus, or driving, but this may increase time needed away from work.

Table 1: Example Grading Costs is a basic cost estimate for an Iaido practitioner needing to travel from Calgary to Vancouver for gradings throughout the first years of their Iaido career.

Table 1: Example Grading Costs

Item	Ikkyu	Shodan	Nidan	Sandan	Total
Travel	\$ 500.00	\$ 500.00	\$ 500.00	\$ 500.00	\$ 2,000.00
Accommodation	\$ 200.00	\$ 200.00	\$ 200.00	\$ 200.00	\$ 800.00
Food	\$ 60.00	\$ 60.00	\$ 60.00	\$ 60.00	\$ 240.00
Examination Fee	\$ 35.00	\$ 50.00	\$ 60.00	\$ 70.00	\$ 215.00
Registration Fee	\$ 35.00	\$ 60.00	\$ 90.00	\$ 150.00	\$ 335.00
Total	\$ 830.00	\$ 870.00	\$ 910.00	\$ 980.00	\$ 3,590.00

Motivation

Given the growth phase of Iaido in Canada it is important to try to increase and maintain membership by trying to motivate students however possible. Gradings are often a motivator for practitioners of the martial arts; new students can use grade/rank to determine where they fit in in the dojo, and they can work at achieving ranks as goals. It is recognized that our Iaido students make great efforts to attend gradings now, but for remote areas in Canada this motivator does not exist for some students due to financial difficulty. The distance and quantity of grades in the first years of practice may actually act as a deterrent for some potential practitioners.

It is felt that modern audio/visual technology has reached a point where the CKF can address the problem of access for those in remote areas and allow those of lesser financial means to participate more fully in the federation.

Solution: Distance Gradings

What is a Distance Grading?

A Distance Grading is a grading for low level practitioners which could be administered by a supervising officer of the CKF in a remote area. This would be done through the recording of the test by video from at least two angles. The supervising officer would officiate the test to ensure that it is up to CKF standards, and following the test they would send the video for review by the Western or Eastern Region Grading Panel, depending on their region. Following the grading no results would be posted until the final results were returned by that Panel.

The intent of Distance Grading is to alleviate the costs suffered by Iaidoka in remote areas. All formal grading practices will apply to provide Iaidoka with a legitimate grading experience. A local panel will be constituted which is as close to the CKF requirements for such panel as is possible. This will provide the challengers with a live panel to perform before, and will also provide those sitting the panel with valuable judging experience.

Who can apply for Distance Grading?

Geography

In consultation with the Chief Examiner and the CKF board of directors, a set of minimum requirements for distance gradings based on geography and cost of travel should be established. Given the various driving conditions in Canada (mountains, freeway availability etc.) it is suggested that a distance grading be considered if students are more than 10 hours driving time from the Greater Vancouver Area or the Greater Toronto Area. A drive of 10 hours to the grading and then back again is not possible from a safety point of view

and so students would have to arrange overnight accommodation in order to participate in the grading. It is felt that this criteria would constitute a minimum distance/cost requirement.

Permission

It is recognized that the ideal situation is for students to grade in person, in front of a fully constituted panel and that students should be encouraged to attend the regular GVA/GTA grading and especially the usual seminar associated with it.

As such it is felt that distance gradings should be offered only upon request to the Chief Examiner (not the Regional Examiner) who will examine the circumstances of each request and evaluate its benefit to the local students and to the art in Canada. The Chief Examiner will then advise the President of the Distance Grading and at that time all CKF administrative grading procedures shall apply as per any regular grading.

Testing Limitations

Higher rank Iaido gradings are not simply about the technical aspects of Iaido. They move on to less tangible aspects such as *seme* and *zanshin* which cannot be easily captured on video. Because of this Distance Gradings will be limited to 3rd Dan and below. Practitioners testing for 4th Dan and above will need to travel to a standard grading.

The Test

Distance Grading Administrator

In order for a dojo or seminar to host a Distance Grading they must have an approved CKF distance grading officer to officiate the test. This officer will be of *yondan* grade or above, must be a member of good standing, and approved by the Chief Grading Examiner. This officer will receive training in the proper grading procedures and will advise the local panel as to the expectations of a panelist.

Video Quality

Video quality must not be less than 480p and two cameras must be used to record the test. They must be tested beforehand to ensure that they are recording properly. One camera will be placed on the judge's table and the second will be placed at least 45 degrees off from the first camera (i.e. one camera at the judges table and one in the corner of the room).

At the discretion of the Eastern or Western Grading Panel (whichever is applicable) the judges may request another view of the test, they may specify the exact locations of the cameras, or request a higher resolution.

This must be done early enough before the test to allow the officiator time to comply.

Procedure

The distance grading will follow the same procedure as a standard CKF grading, with the officiating officer sitting at the judge's table (along with as many other judges or advisers as are approved by the Chief Examiner). Every effort will be made to provide a grading panel as close to the CKF panel requirements as possible.

The officiating officer will not provide challengers with any indication of whether they passed the test or not.

Regional Panel Review

Following the test the officiating officer will send the videos and such local panellist recommendations as are requested by the Chief Examiner to the appropriate Regional Grading Panel. The material can either be sent digitally, or via post, and they will be reviewed by the panel within 14 days of receipt.

Having been given final judgement from the Regional Grading Panel the Distance Grading Officer will then return the results to challengers. All decisions of the panel are final.

Closing

By enabling Distance Gradings it will be possible to reduce the costs incurred by Iaidoka living in remote areas. This will help promote the grading of Iaidoka in those areas, and will help motivate new practitioners to join and pursue Iaido.