



How rare a person
Asks to be pushed
Beyond their limits



Dojo Ranking System



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About the Ranking System

First, it must be understood that this ranking system is an attempt to conceptualize and quantify something that cannot be: the growth of a human being. While it is impossible to measure the evolution of consciousness, it is useful to have a model. Besides, everybody loves a game in which you can level up.

This system supports accountability and acts as a guide for members to seize growth opportunities, clarify where they're going and what to work on, and gain a high-level grasp of Clear and Open's teachings.

Qualifications and attributes are cumulative—the abilities and achievements for each ascending rank includes all those which come before. Members are evaluated according to these core themes:

- Organization and Project Management
- Responsibility
- Communication
- Integrity
- Embodiment of the [Code of Conduct](#) and the [Virtues](#)
- Problem solving
- Shadow work—actual transformation of unproductive attitudes, behaviors, and energies
- Awareness of one's impact on others
- Management skill
- Question asking
- Understanding of and maturity with money
- Knowledge of business principles
- Relationship to authority and power
- Contextual and paradigmatic thinking, especially related to common business dysfunction
- Curiosity
- Commitment to truth
- Willingness to embrace discomfort
- Ability to read underlying motives

This list is not exhaustive. It is impossible to describe exactly what each rank represents for an individual. Candidates should ask themselves and their teachers, “What does the next rank mean for *me*?” and create intentional projects to make the changes necessary. In the beginning ranks, this is predictably often about leaving overwhelm behind. In intermediate ranks, it’s likely to be more about making internal shifts of attitude and behavior related to responsibility. In advanced ranks, it’s often about making difficult, change-creating choices that precipitate excellence.

How Does It Work?

The rank application process you may find [here](#). Class rank (below black belt) promotions may be made by first-degree black belts and above or the founder. Promotions to black belt ranks must be made by individuals of 3rd degree black belt or the founder. Promotions require written nominations and cases made by at least two peers, in addition to the candidate’s manager/mentor, if they have one.

Nominations for promotions are due before the end of each quarter. Applications are then reviewed and the promotions ceremony occurs in a weekly webcast for those approved. Those not approved will be notified via email with practical feedback.

Competition is a double-edged sword. Used well, it inspires. Used poorly, it demoralizes. Members must hold their higher ranks with humility, and their lower ranks with honor and heads held high. Comparison can be useful, but in the end we are all on our own journey, and no one knows the road you’ve traveled except you.

Related to this, the challenge of any ranking system is to balance objective standards with the relative potentials and gifts of each individual. This system seeks to find a balance between recognizing individual effort relative to their ability, as well as holding everyone to similarly high standards.

Timelines listed are approximate and based on average performance. They exist to give a sense of what is possible through persistent work.

This system is only a guide and in the end the wisdom of the examining teacher comes to bear to determine exactly how what a promotion requires from any individual, and how it may or may not serve them to receive it.

Beginner, Intermediate, and Advanced Overview

- Beginner (7th-5th class)
 - White
 - Orange
 - Yellow
- Intermediate (4th-3rd class)
 - Green
 - Blue
- Advanced (2nd-1st class)
 - Purple
 - Brown

Beginner ranks are a lot about moving items from what you *don't know you don't know*, to what you simply *don't know*. In other words, you're gaining awareness of issues you didn't see before at all.

Imagine you've been living in a house in total darkness. You bump into things and hurt yourself. You break things accidentally. You hurt other people. You've got the best of intentions, but you're just not aware of your surroundings and your impact. The beginner level is where you install lights. It takes work just to get them on, and then your only reward is seeing the mess that's causing all the mayhem. This is where many people give up.

It can seem daunting at first. "It gets worse before it gets better" is often said, because actually dealing with the mess is a whole other task than the work you did just to see it. And besides, it's often worse than you thought. But awareness alone does begin to change outcomes, even though the more focused work begins in the intermediate ranks.

At the beginner level, you're still wrestling with resistance, excuses, overwhelm and whatever else that stops you from meeting your challenges head on. It's inevitable but unfortunate that most people waste a great deal of energy kicking and screaming in denial of their real issues, when they could be using that energy to tackle them. Once you're past the deflections that stop you from looking squarely at the mess, you're ready to go to work in the next level.

Working on the bulk of the mess you do in the intermediate level, clearing out what you don't need and fixing what you want to keep. Intermediate ranks are a kind of sobriety. You see exactly how *you* create your challenges in very simple ways. While it may a bit daunting, it's no longer overwhelming, because you can think thematically: how one behavior perpetuates a network of problems in your life. You may still struggle with changing it, but you have clarity. It can be frustrating to see exactly what needs to change and not be able to change it, but this builds strength, musters hunger, and teaches humility you'll need as a mentor yourself one day.

The advanced ranks are about refinement. You've learned to manage yourself, and overt shadow behaviors are long gone. This is where struggle gives way to execution. These ranks don't make excuses, and they see struggle mostly as a waste of energy. Radical responsibility is embodied: "If not I, then who? If not now, when?" This is where you begin to "make it look easy," because you've put in the focused practice and can harvest the rewards.

As my Aikido teacher said to the advanced ranks, "Watch the white belts carefully; they make the same mistakes you do but don't cover them up as well." Humility in the advanced ranks is returning to "Beginner's Mind" and owning where you still need work on the fundamentals, rather than leaning on your accomplishments or self-image that makes you think you're exempt from the basics. This humility is the basis of real leadership: to be more advanced than another person, but also to see how you're working on the same things as your students in one way or another. It's like you're both running around the same track, but you've been running around it longer. The Japanese word for teacher, *sensei*, merely means, "one who comes before."



Class Ranks

White—7th class—“Empty Your Cup”

This is where you begin. 7th class is a special time that is easily unappreciated if led by unselfaware ambition or discomfort. Surrender to “beginner’s mind,” which you will take with you into all higher ranks; it is the knowledge that the only thing you can be sure of is that you have forever more to learn. There is perhaps no more important lesson than this. You can't get there from not-here.

Orange—6th class—“Clear Your Mind”

~3 months

6th and 5th class are beginner ranks. You need to be pushed and prodded to make progress still, because you do not own your change process for yourself. Focus at this first stage is building a foundation for change. This means carving out space, time, energy, and emotional bandwidth to embark on the Clear and Open journey. This is achieved via basic implementation of Clear Workspace, Open Mind. Hallmarks include:

- Inbox zero
- Prioritization of projects
- Significant reduction of distraction
- Engaged in ending chronic overwhelm

Yellow—5th class—“Own Your Life”

~6 months

5th class is awarded when implementation of advanced task, time, and project management strategies produces an internal shift known as “organizational enlightenment.” This is the realization of how one profoundly limits themselves with overwhelm and clutter, and glimpses profound possibilities and dreams achievable with a Clear and Open state.

Because overwhelm is a form of victimhood, candidates also show a basic ability to explore how they create any and all of their problems, and therefore approach them in entirely new ways using the CLEAR process to take personal responsibility without excuses. Proof of the erosion of overwhelm ought to present with previously unknown strengths, enhanced abilities, and most importantly a clear-headedness that augments skill and awareness. Hallmarks include:

- Emergent strengths and skills revealed by absence of overwhelm
- Ability to recognize deflections and excuses soon after making them
- “Organizational enlightenment” realization
- Basic ability to see underlying causes of problems

Realizations and insights at this level may not “stick” and that is expected. Further practice deepens realizations that eventually become permanent in later ranks.

Green—4th class—“Seize Your Power”

~9 months

4th and 3rd class are intermediate ranks. Utilizing the increased space and clarity from the previous ranks, 4th class candidates have the ability to track and stop their own shadow behavior and limiting beliefs. Evidence includes occasional break-through behavior radically different than the former version of self, the ability to stick to a project that challenges stagnative tendencies. Candidates are actively on the path to excellence and made significant progress toward embodiment of the [Code of Conduct](#) and the [Virtues](#).

Life-changing realizations resulting in “getting out of one’s own way” are required. Grasp of issues with authority and active engagement therein. This translates into the realization of where you lack a bias for action and require supervision. The wake up call here is to see where you're giving your power away needlessly, and is a call to move beyond comfort and security and toward thrival.

Self-awareness at 4th class begins to translate into greater awareness of others, allowing for more powerful question asking, identifying limiting beliefs in others, and the ability to discern where supervision is occurring rather than real management. Hallmarks include:

- Identification and engagement with authority issues
- Ability and willingness to look at shadow attitudes and behaviors with curiosity and openness
- Actively changing the remaining ways in which you require supervision
- Cultivating a bias for action

Blue—3rd class—“Dance Your Demons”

~15 months

At this stage, you apply the teachings to make significant life and business changes that were previously stuck-places. Examples include termination of long-time problematic employees, closing unprofitable locations, eliminating misaligned products, transforming unhealthy relationships, etc. These changes demonstrate that your life is no longer run by your shadow, and you're deeply owning your capacity for choice.

Proficiency with The Accountability Path is necessary here, applied to others as well as the self in the form of radical responsibility and the willingness to adhere to discipline in healthy self-interest. At this stage you don't require reminders, nudges, or any other kind of supervision, qualifying you to be a true manager because you can manage yourself. You enjoy inspiration from others, but you don't need it. You have a bias for action that comes from your thirst for personal fulfillment, not obedience to authority or fear of punishment.

This rank represents a difficult kind of “hump” to surpass. Critical and thematic thinking allow you to see changes that need to happen, but only courage, trust, and commitment to truth precipitate the bigger changes. This is where we discover whether the talk about change was only talk or not. Hallmarks include:

- Elimination of need for supervision
- Demonstrated bias for action
- Acceptance of the discomfort of accountability
- Proficiency with The Accountability Path and the elimination of caretaking

Purple—2nd class—“Express Your Virtue”

~2 years

2nd and 1st class are advanced ranks. This stage harvests the hard work of the previous ones. With gross shadow-based structures and limits out of the way, your virtue has room to be expressed. Embodiment of the code combined with the sustained willingness to choose truth over comfort reveals powerful manifestation skill. What you say will happen, happens. You have vision, and the determination and discipline to bring it to fruition.

You are a different person than before, unrecognizable in some ways. Avoidance, overwhelm, and victimhood are laughable to you now. You immediately see them as fear and contraction from your own power. Your attention is on the subtle aspects of your shadow now, often the ways in which you avoid the experiencing goodness you've created for yourself. Hallmarks include:

- Powerful expression of integrity where intention and action are 99% coherent
- Elimination of procrastination, overwhelm, and victimhood as any kind of obstructive problem
- Clear, healthily self-interested vision

Brown—1st class—“Engage Your Destiny”

~3 years

Embodiment of the teachings at this stage are so deep you naturally inspire others to do the same. People look at you and say “How do you do that?” But you know much of it is the simple embodiment of the [code](#) and the [virtues](#) via emotional fortitude and commitment to your own fulfillment.

You show consistent and demonstrated ability to make difficult choices counter to shadow tendencies. You are able to easily diagnose root causes and make complex problems simple. You effortlessly inspire others through your own embodiment of values. You exhibit humility amidst earned excellence.

This rank qualifies the individual to join the apprentice training program. Achievement of this rank does not guarantee acceptance, only the ability to apply.

1st class is the mastery of the Thrival Stage (see The 5 Stages of Engagement in the [Essential Teachings](#) course). It is the culmination of determination, discipline, passion, organization, responsibility, accountability, excellence, and integrity that make you a master of manifestation. You achieve great things, and experience the limits of personal will, which prepares and qualifies you to surrender to flow in the following stages. Hallmarks include:

- Thorough embodiment of the code
- Acceptance of truth and realness as more important than anything else
- Demonstrated significant manifestation through root cause analysis, project and people management
- Ability to give yourself challenging assignments in the name of your own growth



Black Belt Ranks

Cultural conditioning tells us that a black belt means some kind of final mastery, and this is simply not so. It's like having learned all the letters of the alphabet, so you can explore all that can be done with letters. As with many arts, it takes a great deal of training to truly begin, from one perspective. This is not to say that you've not accomplished anything in the class ranks—far from it. It only serves to remind us how much farther one can go. As stated before, the word *sensei* used as “teacher” in Japanese, literally means “one who comes before” which speaks only to experience, not to mastery.

The founder of Aikido, one of the most accomplished martial artists in modern history, famously said, “My students think I never lose my center and that's not so. I simply notice more quickly and return sooner.”

The idea of the attainment of some immovable, perfect state is perhaps the most imperfect idea in the world. The end of the pursuit of such a state is a sign of maturity, often gained through direct experience that higher and higher achievements or mastery do not bring any kind of permanent internal peace. Indeed, the realization is that nothing is permanent. This precipitates a kind of surrender that makes such states far more likely to find you, when you realize you cannot create them from your own personal will. Enlightenment, it's sometimes said, is an accident. You can't make it happen, you can only make yourself accident prone.

Lastly, black belt ranks are inherently more subtle, more subjective, and more difficult to describe than the class ranks. The question of “What does the next rank mean for me?” is more important in these expert ranks. You must be an extremely active participant in your own growth process and self-evaluation in this phase of your journey.

1st degree Black—“Surrender To Flow”

~4 years

The challenges that existed when your journey began as a white belt are gone. But every ending is a new beginning. With your slate clean, in this stage you choose new challenges from a deeper place in yourself, whereas before the challenges appeared to have found you. You see life as a journey of self-expression and learning, so your new project is about inhabiting the next level of you that you've discovered. You're no longer primarily motivated by money or success, because you've experienced the hollowness of those motives, but you enjoy the bounty you've earned.

In some ways, you feel you're back at the beginning of your journey again, with a beginner's mind. People think you know everything sometimes, but you're so humble and connected to learning every moment that you don't experience that you know anything. Your knowledge and skill arise as needed, but it's so effortless you don't experience that you're “doing” it. This is the beginning of the stage of flow. You wrestle with letting go of your highly polished and effective personal will. You cultivated it from nothing, and it served you for a long time, but will not take you to the next phase.

2nd degree Black and Teal—“In One Many”

~7-10 years

It's in this stage that the vast amounts of business knowledge and human psychodynamics are collected and grokked. You can think in terms of principles enough to see the common threads that go through everything, allowing for greatly accelerated learning. You no longer have unproductive beliefs or distorted self-images that impede your perception; i.e. there's dramatically less in your way of directly experiencing reality. Learning is slow when you think you are your mind.

You can solve any problem, because you see underlying dynamics. The question is only in execution and the variables of people, but the path is always clear. You can intuit the immense complexity of any situation and “get your head around it” quickly. You have the breadth of business knowledge to serve proficiently and can quickly learn what you don't know with new industries, situations, people, etc. You dive in and can figure out anything without hesitation.

3rd degree Black and Blue—“In Many One”

~12-15 years

It's said of many masters in various arts, “They make it look easy,” and this is the stage wherein that occurs. You simply no longer experience complexity, as it is inevitably an artifact of mind. You don't need to “get your head around” problems. You see solutions without knowing how you see them or from where they come. You know people's insides as if they're on their outsides, and it is the same with yourself. You're squarely and comfortably in the flow state most of the time. You trust it, and it serves you.

4th degree Black and Purple—“Surrender To Service”

~15-20 years

To teach teachers of Clear and Open, you must not only embody its principles, but see how you do so such that you can transfer it to another. The ultimate in service is the ability to become whomever and whatever is required by the person and situation. A great deal of internal clarity and spaciousness is required to embody such a state. In the end, it is not even a state, but comes from the recognition of and abidance in your true essence.

5th degree Black and Red—“Surrender To Love”

~30 years

This stage is the most difficult to describe. The *flow* state by definition defies description, as it cannot be captured by mind. Individuals at this phase have given their life to flow, and it has taken them. They follow love first, and their mind is firmly and effortlessly in the back seat. Their balance of love, wisdom, and patience is impeccable. They serve by being who they are, which is simple and easeful, yet profoundly deep.