

Tradition and Etiquette

Leave your ego and shoes at the door

Tradition and etiquette are of the highest importance within a Cuong Nhu dojo. When you enter the dojo to learn martial arts, you are joining in an ancient tradition of warrior training whose roots lie in matters of life and death. Even though students today take up Cuong Nhu for a variety of reasons, including fitness and simple enjoyment, the deepest benefits of training come from taking its special nature seriously. Therefore etiquette is a vital part of training. We must all be mindful of tradition, and treat the dojo—and everything connected to it—with respect.

These two simple rules will put you well on your way to the proper attitude and ethic for training:

- *Always conduct yourself with courtesy toward others; and*
- *Give 100% in all your efforts.*

Beyond this, make a point of learning the rules of your dojo. Find out what is considered proper behavior in all areas of training. Observe the senior ranks and instructors, learn from their example, and ask questions about anything that seems unclear.

The following guidelines will answer many of your questions, and provide a starting point for discussions about dojo etiquette.

BOWING TO SHOW RESPECT

In keeping with Asian tradition, Cuong Nhu students bow to show good manners and respect. An instructor or fellow student will show you how to do the Cuong Nhu bow on your first day of class. Use this bow in all the following situations (as well as some others):

- Bow upon entering the dojo, and before you leave. This shows respect for the place where you train, and sets your training apart.
- If your dojo has a separate training floor and/or mat area, you may be expected to bow as you step onto and off the floor or mats. Find out what is required in your dojo, and in any dojo you visit.
- Bow to the senior instructor before joining or leaving class. If you are on time, this will take place during “bowing in” and “bowing out” (described below). However, if you come in late or leave early, you must do this individually.
- Bow to your training partners, before and after practicing together.

RESPECT THE DOJO

Upon entering the dojo, remove your shoes and put them in the shoe rack, if provided, or neatly in their proper place. Take your belongings with you to the dressing room, or place them neatly in the space provided. Never clutter the entrance area or other parts of the dojo with sloppily discarded shoes, clothing, gym bags or other belongings.

Once inside the dojo, maintain proper decorum by keeping your voice low, and avoid distracting those who might be in class or practicing on their own.

Here are some other points to remember:

- Remove chewing gum before entering the dojo.
- Don't eat, drink or bring food into the dojo, except when there are special times and places designated for this.
- Don't change clothes in public; use the dressing room, bathroom, or other designated area.

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- If you need to cross the floor where class is in session, or pass by people who are practicing, always walk behind the class or practicing students.
- Keep all areas of the dojo neat and clean. If you see a mess, clean it up!
- Keep equipment neat, clean and in its proper place. If you see things out of place, put them away!
- It's not appropriate to wear your uniform outside the dojo (except when training outside). If you must leave the dojo in your uniform—for example, if your dojo does not have a changing room—remove your gi top and belt, and wear a t-shirt or sweatshirt with your gi pants.

LINING UP AND BOWING IN

RESPECT THE UNIFORM

The condition of your uniform reflects your seriousness about training. Always come to class with a complete uniform that's clean and in good repair.

A complete uniform means a traditional white karate gi, with the Cuong Nhu patch sewn on the left side over your heart, and your name written or embroidered on the right. Your belt should be properly tied with a square knot, and if you have stripes on your belt, they should be on the left. Men should wear a protective groin cup under the gi pants.

It's ok to wear a t-shirt or tank top under your uniform top if you wish. If you have a school patch, it should be sewn on your sleeve.

Black belts and above may wear black or colored uniforms to train. However, everyone must wear a white uniform to tests and other special events.

- The uniform does not include watches or jewelry! Please remove all jewelry before class.
- Caring for the uniform is very important. Fold it neatly after each class; don't throw it on the floor, or stuff it into your gear bag. Launder your uniform often.
- Show proper respect for your belt. Don't drape it around your neck or throw it on the floor.

When it's time for class to begin, students and instructors will line up and bow in together. You will need to find your proper place in line, according to rank. If you are not sure where to line up, ask an instructor or fellow student to show you where to go. Lining up in your proper place is an important way of showing respect for your fellow students. Senior ranks line up to the left and junior ranks to the right. Be sure to stand behind and/or to the right of everyone who outranks you, and ahead and/or to the left of everyone you outrank. Once you understand how to line up, if you see a new student who needs help finding the right place, be the first to offer help.

Here is a summary of what happens at the start of class:

The command is given to line up:

- Students line up according to rank, facing the head instructor (and any other instructors who will be teaching class).
- All turn to face the Cuong Nhu flag and picture of O Sensei, which are behind the head instructor.

The command is given "Nghiem! Chao!" (*Attention! Bow!*)

- Everyone bows respectfully to O Sensei's picture and the Cuong Nhu flag. Instructors turn to face the students again.

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The command is given “Nghiem! Chao!”

- Instructors and students bow to each other, and assume meditation stance.

The command is given “Nghì!”

- All return to natural stance, and shout in unison, “**Gang!**” which means “effort!” Now they’re ready for class to begin.

Note that only instructors line up in front facing the class, regardless of rank. That means if a senior black belt is present but is not teaching, he or she will line up with the students, while a more junior member who is scheduled to teach may line up in front. Even the head instructor of the dojo may line up with the students, if a visiting instructor is running the class.

BOWING OUT AT THE END OF CLASS

Class ends with a bowing out ceremony similar to the bowing in that started class.

The command is given to line up:

- Students line up according to rank, facing the head instructor (and other instructors, if any).

The command is given, “left turn!”

- Students turn their left; instructors turn to their right; head instructor remains facing front.
- All ranks straighten their uniform and belt, and ensure the lines are straight.

The command is given, “right turn!”

- All face forward again; then,

The command is given, “Nghiem!”

- Instructors and students assume meditation stance.

The command is given, “Nghì!”

- All return to natural stance; then,
- All turn to face the Cuong Nhu flag and picture of O Sensei, which are behind the head instructor.

The command is given, “Nghiem! Chao!”

- Everyone bows respectfully toward O Sensei’s picture and the Cuong Nhu flag; then,
- Instructors turn to face the students again.

The command is given, “Nghiem! Chao!”

- Instructors and students bow to each other.
- All return to natural stance, and shout in unison, “**Gang!**”

Once class is over, clear the training floor so those who wish to continue practicing or sparring may do so. Discussions and socializing should take place off the floor. Remember to keep your voices low.

COMING LATE OR LEAVING EARLY

Punctuality is an important part of the discipline of training. However, you may at times have to join class late or leave early. If you know about it in advance, let your instructor know beforehand.

Once you know the proper protocol, you can join or leave class smoothly, with little disruption. Here’s what to do if you come in late:

- First, if you have missed the warm-ups and stretches, quickly do an adequate warm-up and stretch on your own before bowing in.

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- Next, do a set of pushups (the number pre-determined by your instructor). This is for self-discipline, not punishment; it is an acknowledgement that you are late.
- Step up to the training floor and stand in natural stance at the side, until the senior instructor acknowledges you and you bow. (If you are not sure where you should stand to wait, ask someone beforehand.) If others are also late, you should bow in together, so the instructor does not have to keep bowing in a string of latecomers.

Now you may join class. Find your proper place in line by passing behind the group and taking the least disruptive path to your position.

If you have to leave class early, let the instructor know beforehand. When the time comes, bow to your instructor, and bow off the main floor. Be courteous and quiet as you leave.

RESPECT YOUR INSTRUCTORS

The best way to show respect for your instructor is by attending class regularly, training hard, and following the rules of the dojo. There are some specific points of etiquette, however, that are important to learn.

The first concerns calling individuals by their titles. It is proper and respectful to call or refer to instructors (and others) by the title bestowed on them by their own instructor and the Cuong Nhu style. This applies in the dojo and during seminars and formal events where the individual is in uniform.

HOW TO ADDRESS:	TITLE
Black Belt Instructors	Sensei
Dan Ranks	Sensei
Dan Ranks 6 th Degree and above	Master
Head of Style	Grandmaster
Founder of Style	O Sensei

If you know the instructor's first name, you may call them by their title followed by their first name, for example, "Sensei Charles" or "Master Mary." (Note that 'Sensei' is a Japanese term; but in Cuong Nhu, we use the Vietnamese word order when addressing instructors by name: "Sensei Charles," not "Charles Sensei.")

Your instructor is concerned with your long-term training, and should be informed of any factor that may affect your progress.

- Inform your instructor of any injuries or illnesses that may affect your training.
- Notify him or her if you know you will be missing class.
- Let your instructor know if you are having problems in class, or with any aspect of your training. You should feel free to approach him or her outside class to discuss any relevant concerns.
- If you are considering taking a break or stopping your training, discuss this with your instructor in advance.

The points presented in the next section, Etiquette while Training, also have to do with respecting your instructors, as well as your fellow students. Read the section carefully, and if you have questions about any of it, raise them with senior students or instructors before your next class.

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ETIQUETTE WHILE TRAINING

Your appearance, attitude and behavior in class are extremely important. They will communicate your respect for Cuong Nhu, your instructors and fellow students, and your level of commitment to training.

- Start with personal hygiene: Come to class in a clean uniform, with clean hands and feet, and trimmed nails.
- Listen attentively to all instructions, and try your best to carry them out with 100% effort.
- Don't be distracted by things going on outside class, and don't speak to people who aren't in class. (In a case of real necessity, seek permission from the instructor.)
- When you run into difficulty carrying out instructions or mastering techniques (and you will!), maintain your composure and keep trying. Try not to express frustration; don't let yourself lose your temper.
- Always train with an open mind. Never assume you know better than the instructor—regardless of your rank or experience.
- When the instructor calls students to come together, do it promptly.
- Let your posture indicate an open and attentive mind: When listening to instruction, stand in natural stance with your hands in a relaxed position; or, if seated, sit up straight. Don't slouch, cross your arms, lean against the wall or another person, lounge, or lie down.
- Don't talk when the instructor is speaking. Talking back to the instructor or expressing your opinion on techniques is not appropriate. Never argue with the instructor.

- Never contradict an instructor by saying "Sensei 'x' showed me something different," even if it's true! Questions of this nature should be raised outside class. It is also inappropriate to boast of having learned something directly from a high-ranking instructor.

It is almost always fine to ask questions—politely—if you are uncertain about an instruction or a technique. However, Cuong Nhu is a physical art that cannot be mastered through discussion. If you find yourself constantly asking questions, you may not be focusing hard enough on your practice. Frequent questions can also be a distraction to your fellow students. Here is a good rule of thumb: If it's possible to continue practicing without getting an answer to your question, save it for after class, or for a break when the instructor calls for questions. You may be surprised: The instructor may answer it without your asking; or you may find through practice that you didn't need to ask. In any case, you will get more out of your workout.

WORKING WITH PARTNERS

Two rules are paramount when practicing Cuong Nhu with a partner:

- Treat your partner with utmost courtesy and respect; and,
- Put their safety first.

If you follow these rules, and apply all the principles covered in the previous sections, all should go well. Here are a few more important points:

- Keep questions, comments, or any kind of talk to a minimum; focus on practicing.
- Don't instruct your partner unless your instructor has asked you to do so.

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- Work at a speed and level that is safe for both partners. Take into account the skill level of the less-experienced partner.
- Never joke around or engage in horseplay when working with a partner.
- Always maintain proper control when sparring. Control your fists, your feet, your ego and your temper.
- If you strike someone with more contact than is permissible, immediately apologize and do push-ups.

A Special Case: Sparring

Sparring with a partner requires special equipment for safety, as well as a minimum skill level and specific knowledge of the rules. Never begin sparring before you have received permission from your instructor. If you are unsure, ask the head instructor at what rank and under what circumstances you may begin sparring.

- Always wear a complete set of safety equipment when sparring. Find out exactly what equipment is required, and bring it with you to every class.
- Maintain your gear in good condition—for your own safety, and that of your partner.
- Make sure both you and your partner know and understand the rules of sparring before you begin. This includes knowing what techniques may and may not be used, and understanding what level of contact is permissible.

Many techniques you practice in class are prohibited in sparring, including knee and elbow strikes, attacks to the legs and eyes, and “blind” techniques. Other techniques, such as sweeps, grabs, takedowns and throws, may be limited based on the participants’ skill level, and/or the rules of your dojo. Get fully informed before you begin.

Hard contact when sparring is not acceptable. Cuong Nhu students should strive for a higher skill level, sufficient to achieve non-contact sparring at full speed. If you are uncertain what this means, discuss it with your instructors.

When lining up to bow in or out of class with sparring gear, place your equipment neatly on the floor to the left of your feet.

RESPECT THE EQUIPMENT

Besides sparring gear, you will be using a variety of training equipment, including bags, bag gloves, targets, and at higher ranks, weapons. Treat all training equipment with respect. Handle it with care, and help keep it in good repair. Never throw items down on the floor or across the room.

When an instructor needs targets or other equipment for class, senior students should quickly retrieve them from their storage place, and return them when the drills are completed or at the end of class.

Notes on Handling Weapons:

- Never begin practicing with a weapon until your instructor has given you permission to do so.
- Maintain your weapons in good condition. Discard splintered or broken tambos or bos. Do not allow metal weapons to become rusted. It’s a good idea to keep your weapons in a weapons bag.
- Wooden or bamboo replicas of bladed weapons should be handled with the same respect as genuine weapons with sharp blades.
- Never joke or engage in horseplay when practicing with weapons.

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- When passing a weapon to another person, use both hands and bow to show respect and seriousness. Bladed weapons should be handed with the blade facing you (away from the recipient). Receive a weapon handed to you with both hands, and bow.

VISITING OTHER DOJOS

When visiting other dojos, remember that you are a representative of your home dojo and style. Others will view your behavior as a reflection of your background. The rules of etiquette, respect and courtesy we have presented here should hold you in good stead.

When visiting other dojos, the single most important concept to keep in mind is *humility*:

- Never line up as an instructor unless you are invited to do so—regardless of your rank.
- Seek an appropriately modest place in line; for example, if you are a brown belt, go to the end of the brown belt line, unless you are directed to go elsewhere.
- Don't offer instruction or comments unless you are asked to share.
- If asked to make any changes in the way you conduct yourself, do so right away.
- Never say or do anything that might embarrass or humiliate a student or instructor.
- Avoid doing things to show off or draw undue attention to yourself.

TESTING FOR RANK

Advancement in rank is a natural outgrowth of attending class regularly and training hard. Your instructor is aware of your progress, and will let you know when you are ready to test. It is not appropriate for you to decide that you are ready to test, nor should you ask your instructor when you will get to take a test. This matter is entirely the responsibility of the instructor.

When you are asked to take a test, you may assume the instructor believes you have trained sufficiently and possess the maturity to handle testing and promotion. However, there is no guarantee you will pass. You must step up to the challenge and perform on the day of the test. Here are some essentials:

- You must wear a clean, white uniform with name, patch, and belt, for tests and promotion.
- If your test involves sparring or board breaking, you are responsible for having all necessary equipment ready.
- If a written paper or other paperwork is required (advanced ranks), you are responsible for getting it to the testing instructor one month in advance.
- During the test, show the same courtesy, respect, spirit and effort that are always expected of you—only more so!
- Bow to the testing instructor before and after breaking boards, public speaking and demonstrations. Remove all boards and debris from the floor after breaking.
- Show courtesy for the testers and other test candidates by remaining quiet and attentive while others take their turns, and while waiting for results.

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- Never leave the test without permission or a valid reason. Stay through to the end of the promotion ceremony, regardless of the outcome.

Etiquette for Spectators:

Feel free to invite friends and family to watch your tests and support your efforts. However, make sure they know about any dojo rules that will affect them (for example, removing shoes), and let them know how they should behave during the test.

- Spectators should be quiet, and should not talk to students when they are testing or training.
- When candidates are breaking boards, spectators should wait until all sets are complete and the candidate has bowed out before applauding.
- Spectators should feel free to move around during the test, including moving close to the action to take photographs—so long as they don't interfere with the test or ceremonies.
- Congratulations, handshakes and hugs are in order, only after the test and promotion ceremonies are completed and the candidates have bowed out.

The Promotion Ceremony

At the conclusion of the test, or at a specified time following the test, candidates and dojo members will line up facing the instructors to learn the results. Candidates who have passed will be called forward to receive their stripe or belt promotion. (If you are worried about knowing what to do when called forward, ask a senior student to go over the protocol with you beforehand.) After receiving the new rank, bowing to the instructors, and bowing to the members, successful test candidates should return to a place in line that's appropriate for their new rank.

Candidates who have received probation or failure will have been informed of the outcome prior to the ceremony. If this happens to you, don't be discouraged. Many excellent martial artists have received probation or failure on a test at some point in their training. The key is to find out exactly what you need to improve, and set out to improve it right away. Show your good spirit and determination. Take part in the promotion ceremony, and applaud the successful candidates. Then speak to your instructors to make sure you understand what was unacceptable in your performance, and what you need to do in order to pass. Get a timetable for completing the requirements. Make a plan for training and preparation. Seek help if necessary. If you take all these steps, you can be confident of your future success and advancement.

