

Introduction:

This document is intended to define and provide a basic pronunciation key for basic Japanese used during kendo practices. The many of our definitions are taken from Jim Breen's World Wide Web Japanese Online Dictionary, which can be found at <http://www.csse.monash.edu.au/~jwb/wwwjdic.html>, and also from the All U.S. Kendo Federation Website at <http://www.auskf.info/>. They are great resources.

Disclaimer: We are not professional linguists, so this document may (or most likely) contain errors or information which is not *entirely* accurate. Please use the following document as a light and entertaining guide to help bridge the language barrier, not as a definitive source.

A few points about the Japanese language:

Japanese, unlike English, contains many more words which are homonyms, or words that are pronounced the same but have multiple meanings. This is typically a source of confusion for novice Japanese speakers and native Japanese speakers alike. If you try to find definitions of kendo terms on your own, please keep that in mind.

An example:

Kendo:

- 1) 権道 【けんどう】 inappropriate means to a worthy end; expediency.
- 2) 県道 【けんどう】 prefectural road.
- 3) 剣道 【けんどう】 kendo; swordsmanship; fencing.

An amusing non-kendo example:

Niwa niwa niwa niwatori ga imasu.

庭には二羽鶏がいます - In the backyard there are two chickens.

A few words about pronunciation:

In general all of the romanized (romaji) versions of Japanese letters are pronounced as written, with one exception. The letter を is written in roman characters as “wo”, as in “kiwotsuke” but is pronounced more often as “o” to sound more like “ki-o-tsuke” or “kyotsuke”, identical to the お “o” sound in “otagai”. It is written in roman characters as “wo” to differentiate the two letters from each other. In some cases the use of “wo” is optional and denotes a slightly more formal tone, while its omission denotes more of an imperative command. In cases where the use of “wo” is optional, it is indicated by parentheses. Many times you will see the character of は (“ha”) written, but if it is used outside of a word it is pronounced “wa” like the character わ. In addition, if the character へ is used in a word it is pronounced “hey”, while if it is used outside of a word in a sentence it is pronounced “eh” identical to え.

Many written words in common usage drop the unemphasized and sometimes silent “u” う. Two examples are “bogu” (bogu) and “kyuu” (kyu). Sometimes it is easier for non-Japanese speakers to think of these “silent” characters as a sign to hold the vowel or consonant a little longer.

For ease of pronunciation and computerized input systems, the phonetic romanization (Hepburn system) is used in this glossary. The complete roman spelling is first, followed by the

common spelling in parentheses if different from the phonetic version. The kanji follow the romanized version of the word, and the hiragana phonetic characters are last.

A pronunciation guide follows the glossary if you feel like you need more information.

A brief note about dialects:

There are about one hundred dialects of Japanese, including those that were constructed deliberately. They range from slight differences in pronunciation to differences so pronounced that the dialect is unintelligible for other Japanese speakers from other parts of the country. Please keep this in mind as the terminology from school to school and individual instructors may be different from what is listed here.

A few words about politeness:

Japanese has many levels of formality. The ritualized language used within Kendo practice is more formal and polite than everyday language. The general rule is that the longer the phrase, the more polite it is.

An example:

The following phrases all mean “Thank you”, the English translation roughly approximates the level of formality implied by their usage:

- 1) Doumo (Domo) どうも : thanks (informal)
- 2) Arigato 有難う 【ありがとう】 : thanks (informal)
- 3) Doumo arigato どうも有難う 【どうもありがとう】 : thank you (formal)
- 4) Arigato gozaimasu 有難うございます 【ありがとうございます】 : thank you (formal)
- 5) Doumo arigato gozaimasu どうも有難うございます 【どうもありがとうございます】 : thank you (very much) (formal+)

Notice that the phrase used during kendo practice is the “formal+” version.

Definitions – now the good stuff!

People:

1. Sensei: 先生 【せんせい】 : teachers, instructors – in kendo usually reserved for someone at 3rd Dan and up.
2. Senpai: 先輩 【せんぱい】 : senior
3. Kouhai (Kohai): 後輩 【こうはい】 : junior
4. Kenshi: 剣士 【けんし】 : a practitioner of kendo, fencer
5. Kendoka: 剣道家 【けんどうか】 : a practitioner of kendo, fencer
6. Senshu: 選手 【せんしゅ】 : player, competitor
7. Shinpan: 審判 【しんぱん】 : referee
8. Shinpanin: 審判員 【しんぱんいん】 : referee

Cultural note: the relationship between senior and junior is one aspect of kendo that establishes not only a hierarchy, but also a support structure. A 6th Dan and a 7th Dan will use these terms and relationships just as a beginner and ranking person might.

Equipment:

1. Keikogi: 稽古着 【けいこぎ】 : kendo uniform (top)
2. Hakama: 袴 【はかま】 : man's formal divided skirt (kendo uniform bottom)
3. Bougu (Bogu): 防具 【ぼうぐ】 : protector (general name for kendo equipment)
4. Men: 面 【めん】 : face mask
5. Kote: 小手 【こて】 : gauntlet (used in Kendo)
6. Dou (Do): 胴 【どう】 : body protector
7. Tare: 垂れ 【たれ】 : hanging waist protector
8. Zekken: 【ゼッケン】 : name marker (from the German word 'Decken'), worn over the center panel of the Tare.
9. Nafuda: 名札 【なふだ】 : name marker
10. Himo: 紐 【ひも】 : string/lacing used to secure equipment.
11. Shinai: 竹刀 【しなひ】 : bamboo sword
12. Bokken: 木剣 【ぼっけん】 : wooden sword
13. Bokutou (Bokuto): 木刀 【ぼくとう】 : wooden sword
14. Tenugui: 手ぬぐい 【てぬぐい】 : handtowel, used to wrap the head before wearing the Men.
15. Tsuba: つば : handguard
16. Tsubadome: つば止め 【つばどめ】 : handguard stopper

At the start and end of practice:

- 1) Retsu: 列 【れつ】 : line, or to form a line
- 2) Kiwotsuke (pronounced Kyotsuke): 気を付け 【きをつけ】 : (Stand to) attention!
- 3) Seiza 正座, 正坐 【せいざ】 : sitting correctly (Japanese-style); sitting with the knees underneath the body.
- 4) Chakuza 着座 【ちゃくざ】 : Sit in seiza position.
- 5) Mokuso (Mokuso): 黙想 【もくそう】 meditation; silent contemplation.
- 6) Yame: 止め 【やめ】 : stop (command)
- 7) Hajime: 始め 【はじめ】 : start (command)

- 8) Mokuso-yame (Mokuso-yame): 黙想止め【もくそうやめ】 : stop meditating
- 9) ... ni mukat-te: …に向かって【…にむかって】 : face towards ... (command).
- a. There are three different versions of the first bow. They are:
 - i. Shoumen: 正面【しょうめん】 : the front, façade (secular)
 - ii. Shinzen: 神前【しんぜん】 : before god, before an altar (Buddhist)
 - iii. Kamiza: 上座【かみざ】 : chief seat; seat of honor
 - b. The second bow:
 - i. Sensei: 先生【せんせい】 : teacher
 - ii. Sensei gata: 先生方【せんせいがた】 : teachers
 - c. The third bow:
 - i. Otagai: お互い【おたがい】 : each other, reciprocal.
- 10) Rei: 礼【れい】 : Bow
- 11) Yoroshiku onegai shimasu: 宜しくお願ひします【よろしくおねがひします】 : a phrase that does not directly translate into English. "onegai" generally means "to ask for" or "please". "Yoroshiku" is a phrase used when you receive some sort of accommodation from another party, and that you are acknowledging this imposition by requesting the other party's good will and understanding. This phrase can also be used as a greeting, expressing these same sentiments. Can be abbreviated to “onegai shimasu”.
- 12) Doumo arigato gozaimashita : どうも有難うございました【どうもありがとうございました】 : thank you very much (past tense) (formal+)
- 13) Men (wo) tsuke: 面(を)付け【めん(を)つけ】 : put on your men
- 14) Men (wo) tore: 面(を)取れ【めん(を)とれ】 : take off your men
- 15) Shinai (wo) mote: 竹刀(を)持て【しな(を)もて】 pick up your shinai.

Numbers: These are the cardinal numbers.

- 1) Ichi: 一【いち】 : one
- 2) Ni: 二【に】 : two
- 3) San: 三【さん】 : three
- 4) Shi (Yon): 四【し; よん】 : four
- 5) Go: 五【ご】 : five
- 6) Roku: 六【ろく】 : six
- 7) Shichi (Nana): 七【しち, なな】 : seven
- 8) Hachi: 八【はち】 : eight
- 9) Kyu (Ku): 九【きゅう; く】 : nine
- 10) Jyu: 十【じゅう】 : ten
- 11) Ni-Jyu: 二十【にじゅう】 : twenty
- 12) San-Jyu: 三十【さんじゅう】 : Thirty
- 13) Yon-Jyu: : Forty
- 14) Go-Jyu: : Fifty

...kai …回【かい】 : (number) times (postpositional counter for occurrences). Ex. San-Jyu kai: Thirty times.

...dan …段【だん】 : (number) rank (postpositional counter for “black belt” ranks).
 Exception: Shodan 初段【しょだん】 : 1st degree “black belt”.

...kyuu (kyu) … 級 【きゅう】 : (number) rank (postpositional counter for non black belt ranks)

Ippon 一本 【いっぽん】 : a point, a (scoring) blow.

Warm up exercises:

- 1) Taisou (Taiso): 体操 【たいそう】 : exercise, warm up exercises
- 2) (...)Suburi: (….) 素振り 【すぶり】 a cut or stretching movement with a (wooden/bamboo) sword, usually from a starting position above one's head.
 - a. Jyouge suburi (Jyoge suburi) 上下素振り 【じょうげすぶり】 : high to low, up and down cuts.
 - b. Renzoku sayuu suburi: 連続左右素振り 【れんぞくさゆうすぶり】 : continuous left and right. Often abbreviated as “sayuu-suburi” 左右素振り 【さゆうすぶり】
 - c. Katate suburi: 片手素振り 【かたてすぶり】 : one handed.
 - d. Yoko-men suburi: 横面素振り 【よこめんすぶり】 : to the sides of the men.
 - e. Matawari suburi: 股割り素振り 【またわりすぶり】 : (lit. thigh splitting cut). Feet placed outside of shoulder width, with toes pointing at a 45 degree angle. This stretch starts as a big men cut and finishes at kote height, while squatting during the downward cut. An upright posture throughout the stretch is key.

Ashi-sabaki Footwork:

- 1) Okuri-ashi: 送り足 【おくりあし】 : sliding step with the right foot forward.
- 2) Hiraki-ashi: 開き足 【ひらきあし】 : “opening” side step, used in sayuu suburi.
- 3) Ayumi ashi: 歩み足 【あゆみあし】 : walking step, such as the step used by the receiver of kirikaeshi
- 4) Fumikomi: 踏み込み 【ふみこみ】 : the lunge step which accompanies a strike, lateral “stomp”.

Directions:

- A.) Mae: 前 【まえ, まい】 : forward
- B.) Ato: 後 【あと】 : backward
- C.) Hidari: 左 【ひだり】 : left
- D.) Migi: 右 【みぎ】 : right
- E.) Susume: 進め 【すすめ】 : step forward, advance (command)
- F.) Sagare: 下がれ 【さがれ】 : step backward (command)

Practice terms:

- 1) Shiai: 試合 【しあい】 : competition.
- 2) Waza: 業 【わざ】 : technique.
 - a. Kihon waza: 基本業 【きほんわざ】 : basic techniques.
 - b. Sashi-men: 差し面 【さしめん】 : Fast or quick-men.
- 3) Tai-tou (Tai-to): 帯刀 【たいとう】 : Sword position at the level of the belt/obi (command) after the bow and before initiating the approach to sonkyo.
- 4) Sonkyo: 蹲踞 【そんきょ】 : formal crouch at the beginning/ending of a kendo match.
- 5) Sage-tou (Sage-to) : 下げ刀 【さげとう】 : Lowered sword position before and after Tai-tou.

- 6) Kamae: 構え 【かまえ】 :
- To make ready (“on guard”)
 - Type of guard position.
 - Jodan no Kamae : 上段の構え 【じょうだんのかまえ】 High position of the sword over your head. Considered a very aggressive stance for higher level Kendo practitioners.
 - Chudan no Kamae : 中段の構え 【ちゅうだんのかまえ】 Most common mid level stance with tip of sword pointing at your opponents throat.
 - Gedan no Kamae : 下段の構え 【げだんのかまえ】 Least common stance. Sword tip is below kneecap level.
- 7) Kirikaeshi: 切り返し 【きりかえし】 : (lit. returning cuts) An exercise where a certain sequence of men-suburi is traded between two partners, usually at the beginning and end of practice.
- Keiko (...geiko) 稽古 【けいこ, …げいこ】 : practice
- Mitori Geiko 見取り 【みとり】 : the practice of learning by watching others.
 - Uchikomi (geiko): 打ち込み 【うちこみ】 : practice involving the repetition of one strike.
 - …wo ute. …を打て 【をうて】 : Strike (target, ie men). (Instructional command).
 - Kakari-geiko: 掛かり稽古 【かかりげいこ】 : (attacking practice) practice where the receiver only opens for variety of target areas and the attacker strikes.
 - Aikakari-geiko: 相掛かり稽古 【あいかかりげいこ】 : (attacking practice) simultaneously attacking practice.
 - Ji-geiko 地稽古 【じげいこ】 : open sparring practice.
 - Hikitate ji-geiko: 引き立て地稽古 【ひきたて】 : (‘to favor’ or ‘to promote’) open sparring practice between two individuals of differing rank.
 - Gokaku ji-geiko: 互角地稽古 【ごかく】 : (‘of equal rank’) open sparring practice between two individuals of similar rank.
 - Shiai ji-geiko (ji-geiko) 試合地稽古 【しあい】 : competition sparring.
17. Ippon shoubu: 一本勝負 【いっぽんしょうぶ】 : 1 point match/first point wins match.
18. Hansoku: 反則 【はんそく】 : a foul/penalty (call). Two hansoku equals a full point deduction.
19. Wakare: 別れ 【わかれ】 : (command) separate/split up – time continues.
20. Enchou: 延長 【えんちょう】 : overtime, sudden death overtime.
21. Maai: 間合い 【まあい】 (?) : the ideal maximum distance between two opponents. This is different for each person and can take a long time to develop or extend it.
- Issoku-ittou: 一歩一刀 【いっそくいっとう】 : “One step, one sword”
 - To-ma : 遠間 【とおま】 : “distant interval”
 - Tsubazeriai : 鍔迫り合い 【つばぜりあい】 : (forcefully meeting at the tsuba) Where the two opponents are pressed against each other using the hips to drive forward, the arms are braced against each of their own chest protectors creating a pocket of open space. Both opponents are waiting for the optimum moment to either go through or strike while going backward.
 - Taiatari: 体当たり; 体当り 【たいあたり】 : ramming attack, body blow.

- e. Chikama : 近間 【ちかま】 : “close interval”
 22. Ai-uchi: 相打ち 【あいうち】 : simultaneously striking one another.

Kata 形 【かた】 - forms

...pon-me/hon-me …本目 【ほんめ/ほんめ】 : (number) postpositional counter for referring to kata.

- a. Ippon-me: 一本目 【いっぽんめ】
 - b. Nihon-me: 二本目 【にほんめ】
 - c. Sanbon-me: 三本目 【さんぼんめ】
 - d. Yonhon-me: 四本目 【よんほんめ】
 - e. Gohon-me: 五本目 【ごほんめ】
 - f. Roppon-me: 六本目 【ろっぽんめ】
 - g. Nanahon-me: 七本目 【ななほんめ】
 - h. Hachihon-me/happon-me: 八本目 【はちほん; はっぽん】
 - i. Kyuuhon-me: 九本目 【きゅうほんめ】
 - j. Juppon-me: 一本目 【じゅっぽんめ】
- 1) Uchidachi: 打太刀 【うちだち】 : the leader or attacker in a form/kata. The uchidachi always loses. This is to imply that being the attacker is not always best approach to a situation.
 - 2) Shidachi: 仕太刀 【しだち】 : the responder to the provocations of the uchidachi.
 - 3) Motodachi: 元立ち 【もとだち】 : the name given to the receiver during waza /non-kata practice.

Concepts

- 1) Zanshin: 残心 【ざんしん】 : (‘kokoro wo nokosu’- I leave my spirit behind, ‘kokoro ga nokoru’ – my spirit remains) follow through.
- 2) Seme: 攻め 【せめ】 : attack.
- 3) Sutemi: 捨て身; 捨身 【すてみ】 : (lit. To throw away one’s life) At the risk of one’s life. Without reservation, total commitment.
- 4) Ki ken tai icchi 気剣体一致 【きけんたいいち】 : (lit. the spirit, sword, body are one.) Can mean that there is no true distinction between the spirit, sword, body and mind in kendo.
- 5) Enzan no metsuke 遠山の目付け 【えざんのめつけ】 : (lit: looking as if gazing at a far away mountain) To see everything in proper perspective, not focusing on a particular detail to the point of not seeing something else.
- 6) Kiai 気合い 【きあい】 : Showing of one’s fighting spirit, drawing from the “hara” or center of ones being. Sometimes used to goad an opponent on.
- 7) Mitsu no sen 三つの先 【みつのせん】 : “The three advantageous positions”
 - a. Sen sen no sen 先々の先 【せんせんのせん】 : To put oneself at an advantage by preceiving one’s opponent’s intention, and striking before the opponent has a chance to realize their attack (ie. debana waza).
 - b. Sen 先 【せん】 : To take an opponent’s initiative after they have begun an attack (nuki waza). This strategy is exemplified in the first and second kata.
 - c. Tai no sen 待の先 【たいのせん】 also Go no sen 後の先 【ごのせん】 : “Wait” or “after”. To endure an opponent’s attack and counterattack after the opponent’s momentum is gone.

A very short guide to pronunciation:

The following table is a “quick” pronunciation guide to Japanese characters if you are confused about how a term is pronounced. There really is no replacement for hearing someone speak the terms correctly, so please use this portion of the glossary as a very rough guide.

Japanese letters other than vowels are made up of two sounds, a hard consonant and a vowel sound. Japanese vowels tend to be “short vowel” sounds in English. Each column in the table corresponds to one particular consonant, and each row of the table corresponds to a certain vowel sound. The first column is made up of all vowel sounds. Several spaces in the table are left blank because several letters in the Japanese alphabet have been eliminated. This table uses only “hiragana” characters, because almost all of the terms in this list use this character set. A separate character set called “katakana” exists for words from other languages.

“N”	“W”	“R”	“Y”	“M”	“H”	“N”	“T”	“S”	“K”		
nん	waわ	raら	yaや	maま	haは	naな	taた	saさ	kaか	aあ	“a”
		riり		miみ	hiひ	niに	chiち	shiし	kiき	eい	“i”
		ruる	yuゆ	muむ	huふ	nuぬ	tsuつ	suす	kuく	uう	“u”
		reれ		meめ	heへ	neね	teて	seせ	keけ	eえ	“e”
	woを	roろ	yoよ	moも	hoほ	noの	toと	soそ	koこ	oお	“o”

Here are some example English words that correspond to one letter from each column and row:

no	walk	result	you	me	halt	knoll	tennis	soon	keel	apply	
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Several columns are characters that are further modified by the addition of quotes or a small circle – both are placed in the upper right corner of the character they modify. This changes the consonants at the beginning of the character respectively:

“P”	“B”	“D”	“Z”	“G”	
paぱ	baば	daだ	zaざ	gaが	“a”
piぴ	biび	jiぢ	jiじ	giぎ	“i”
puぷ	buぶ	zuづ	zuず	guぐ	“u”
peぺ	beべ	deで	zeぜ	geげ	“e”
poぽ	boぼ	doど	zoぞ	goご	“o”

Certain characters may be written small in combination with others to produce additional syllables. Similar to abbreviations, these small characters denote that the sound is to be underaccented than if it were written largely. Some examples are shown below:

ち“chi”	し“shi”	り“ri”	ま“mi”	ひ“hi”	に“ni”	き“ki”	
chaちゃ	shaしゃ	ryaりゃ	myaまゃ	hyaひゃ	nyaにゃ	kyaきゃ	“ya”ゃ
chuちゅ	shuしゅ	ryuりゅ	myuまゅ	hyuひゅ	nyuにゅ	kyuきゅ	“yu”ゅ
choちょ	shoしょ	ryoりょ	myoまょ	hyoひょ	nyoにょ	kyoきょ	“yo”ょ

Please feel free to explore the web or seek additional instruction/information.