



Lakewood Budo Kai

Fujitsu, Karate, and Women's Self Defense

Martial Arts Ranks and Titles

Martial arts are military arts and, like the military, there are many ranks and titles. Before we can understand ranks and titles, we need to know that students are generally grouped according to their age.

- Yonen (Junior) - up to age 12
- Shonen (Intermediate) - ages 13 to 16
- Seinen (Adult) - ages 17 and up

In a traditional Asian culture, the older someone is the more life experiences they can share with you. You have more to learn from someone who is 60 years old than you do from someone who is 14. The 14 year old hasn't had the benefit of life experiences so they don't have as much knowledge and wisdom as someone who is 60. Using the above age groupings, in a traditional Dojo a Seinen adult white belt is considered a higher rank than a Yonen junior purple belt.

A Seinen ranking system groups students into two categories, ranks below black belt and black belts.

- Students below the rank of black belt are called Mudansha, one without rank. Meaning that they haven't yet reached the rank of black belt. These students wear a variety of different belt colors. Generally the darker the color, the higher the student's rank.
- Student that have reached the rank of black belt are called Yudansha, one with rank. Black belts generally have belts that are black in color. In our school there are ten degrees of black belt (1 being lowest and 10 being the highest). Some higher ranking black belts may wear different colored belts to distinguish their rank from lower ranking black belts.

In addition to the ranking system described above, there are many informal and formal titles that may exist in a traditional school. Examples of informal titles include:

- Sempai – a student who is a higher rank or more "senior".
- Kohai – a student who is more "junior" in rank.
- Sensei – awarded to black belts (2nd to 4th degree black belt). Literally means "one who has gone before".
- O'Sensei – head Sensei (or major Sensei) awarded at 5th degree black belt or higher.

Our school is a member of a martial arts organization. Formal titles are generally awarded by the organization, not our school. Formal titles include:

- Renshi – "polished instructor" skilled in teaching all techniques.
- Kyoshi – "professor capable of teaching the philosophy of the martial arts".
- Hanshi – "a model for the rest, an ideal model for others".



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Other terms you may hear include:

- Shodai – founder of a martial arts style.
- Kodansha – the highest ranking individuals in an organization.
- Soke – current head of a martial arts style, chosen not for techniques, but for best chance at survival of the ryu.
- Soke Dai – heir apparent (next Soke).