

# THE BELT RANKS OF GŌJŪ-RYŪ

We will describe about the Belt or Rank System which is used in our Dōjō. You need to be aware of the respective ranks because of how you will line up in class, and also so you will know how you will progress higher in the school. Rank is used to keep students motivated or to give them a sense of progression, of accomplishment and separates different levels of skill within a group. Below is a general table showing how the adult ranks are arranged. The ranks for children vary slightly, but roughly follow a similar sequence.



BLACK BELT RANKS ( 黒帯の段位 = Kuroi-Obi no Dan-i )		
Written Report Required	Japanese Pronunciation	English Meaning
	Ju-Dan ( 十段 )	10 <sup>th</sup> Degree Black Belt
	Kyū-Dan ( 九段 )	9 <sup>th</sup> Degree Black Belt
	Hachi-Dan ( 八段 )	8 <sup>th</sup> Degree Black Belt
	Shichi-Dan / Nana-Dan ( 七段 )	7 <sup>th</sup> Degree Black Belt
	Roku-Dan ( 六段 )	6 <sup>th</sup> Degree Black Belt
	Go-Dan ( 五段 )	5 <sup>th</sup> Degree Black Belt
	Yon-Dan ( 四段 )	4 <sup>th</sup> Degree Black Belt
	San-Dan ( 三段 )	3 <sup>rd</sup> Degree Black Belt
	San-Dan-Ho ( 三段補 )	Interim 3rd Degree Black Belt
Required prior to testing for Ni-Dan: A written report on "Kumite"	Ni-Dan ( 二段 )	2 <sup>nd</sup> Degree Black Belt
	Ni-Dan-Ho ( 二段補 )	Interim 2 <sup>nd</sup> Degree Black Belt
Required prior to testing for Sho-Dan: A written report on "How to Teach a Student from White Belt to Black Belt"	Sho-Dan ( 初段 )	1 <sup>st</sup> Degree Black Belt
	Sho-Dan-Ho ( 初段補 )	Interim 1 <sup>st</sup> Degree Black Belt

ADULT BEGINNING & INTERMEDIATE LEVELS ( 級 = Kyū )			
Written report on "What Kata Saifa Means to Me"  (Required prior to testing for Sho-Dan-Ho Black Belt)	Ik-Kyū / Cha-Iro Obi San Kuroi 一級 / 茶色帯 三黒い	1 <sup>st</sup> Level / Brown Belt with Three Black Stripes	
	Ni-Kyū / Cha-Iro Obi Ni Kuroi 二級 / 茶色帯 二黒い	2 <sup>nd</sup> Level / Brown Belt with Two Black Stripes	
	San-Kyū / Cha-Iro Obi Ichi Kuroi 三級 / 茶色帯 一黒い	3 <sup>rd</sup> Level / Brown Belt with One Black Stripe	
Written report on "What Kata Sanchin Means to Me"  (Required prior to testing for Brown Belt)	Yon-Kyū / Murasaki Obi 四級 / 紫帯	4 <sup>th</sup> Level / Purple Belt	
	Go-Kyū / Aoi Obi 五級 / 青帯	5 <sup>th</sup> Level / Blue Belt	
	Roku-Kyū / Midori Obi 六級 / 緑帯	6 <sup>th</sup> Level / Green Belt	

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## Beginning & Intermediate Belt Ranks (Continued)

Japanese Pronunciation	English Meaning	Belt Color
Shichi (or Nana)- Kyū / Orenji Obi 七級 / オレンジ帯	7 <sup>th</sup> Level / Orange Belt	
Hachi- Kyū / Ki-Iro Obi 八級 / 黄色帯	8 <sup>th</sup> Level / Yellow Belt	
Ku-Kyū / Shiroi Obi Ichi Ki-Iro 九級 / 白い帯 一黄色	9 <sup>th</sup> Level / White Belt with One Yellow Stripe	
Ju- Kyū / Shiroi Obi 十級 / 白い帯	10 <sup>th</sup> Level / White Belt (Beginner)	



Promotional tests at our Dōjō are given every 3-4 months, and if qualified, a higher rank is awarded. Each level signifies mastery of certain skills and knowledge required for that rank.

### Background on How the Belt Colors Developed

Karate didn't always have a belt ranking system. Back in the days when Karate was known as "Chinese Hand" or *Tote*, there was no need for a Belt ranking system, because everyone in the Dōjō knew who the Senior student and Teacher or Master was.



One tradition teaches that in the early days of Okinawan Martial Arts, all Karate-Ka started out with a White Belt. In time, and the change of seasons, spring would come about and with it green grass, pollen and dust. Since the Belt was never washed as a symbol of hard work put forth into one's training (as is today) Spring could leave behind on your White Belt a tinge of green, since most Dōjō of the day were exposed to the elements or classes were held outdoors, and depending on how much training you participated in. With the coming of fall and winter the soot and muck of Nature would further stain the once White Belt. After several turning of seasons, and repeated summers of heat to bake and darken the colors, the Belt eventually turned Black! Thus explaining the origin of the Black Belt.



With the advent of change came the introduction of a standardized structure that would separate students by levels of comprehension in their style of Martial Art. This structure had already been in place before "The meeting of the Masters" in the 1930's in Japan, yet it was formally standardized by the Okinawan Martial Art systems as it was in Tokyo just some time before (early 1930's).

Endorsed by the Butoku-kai, the wearing of sashes and Belts was originally conceived of by the founder of Jūdō, Jigoro Kano. Mr. Kano first foresaw the need to distinguish the difference between the advanced practitioner and the different levels of beginners; thus he developed the *Dan/Kyū* system.



The *Dan*, or Black Belt, indicated an advanced proficiency level and those who earned it became known as *Yudansha* (*Dan* recipients). The higher the number or degree for a Black Belt, the higher the rank.

The *Kyū* degrees represented the varying levels of competency below the *Dan*, and were known as *Mudansha* (those not yet having received a *Dan*). The lower belt levels started with larger numbers or degrees, and each rank rose to the highest degree in the beginner/intermediate system, prior to reaching Black Belt levels. The wearing of colored belts is often associated with *Kyū* ranks, and it is common to see the darker colors associated with the higher ranks closest to Black Belts. The White Belt signifies the lowest ranked color, and Brown is the last color before entering Black, with other colors being in the middle ranks.

段 = Dan

(for the advanced  
Black Belt levels)

級 = Kyū

(for the Beginner  
and Intermediate  
belt levels)

Kano Sensei felt it particularly important for all students to fully realize that one's training was in no way complete simply because one had achieved the *Dan* degree. On the contrary, he emphasized that the attainment of the *Dan* rank merely symbolized the real beginning of one's journey. By reaching Black Belt level, one had, in fact, completed only the necessary requirements to embark upon a relentless journey without distance that would ultimately result in self-mastery.



### Titles for Highly-Ranked Practitioners

The *Dai-Nippon Butoku-kai* (大日本武徳, the “Greater Japan Martial Virtues Association,” often just called the *Butoku-kai*) is the official entity that governs all Martial Arts from Japan on an international basis. The *Butoku-kai* adopted and issued the first titles distinguishing modern day martial arts practitioners (*Budō-ka*). These *Budō-ka* were esteemed as either being prominent or exceptional in their styles by their peers as well as by the *Butoku-kai*. In the *Butoku-kai*, ranking is the assessment of an individual's course toward the attainment of excellence through practice and tradition. This judgment is not based on mortal superior ability however includes the entire mortal, moral, and spiritual and developmental credentials and aspects.

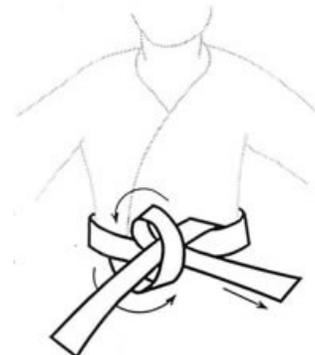


The first *Shihan* (師範 “Master Teacher”) title was *Hanshi* (範士 “Model Expert” or “Teacher by Example”), and *Kyoshi* (教士), originally known as *Tasshi* (達師 “Teaching Expert”). In 1934, a third title was introduced, *Renshi* (錬士 “Well Trained or Skilled Expert”). These are the same ranks awarded to masters today.

### How to Tie Your Karate Belt

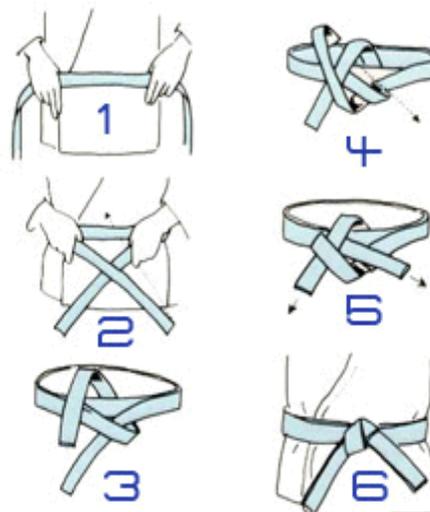
The main thing to remember is that tying your karate belt is similar to tying a square knot, with a slight variation. The belt should sit above the hip bones and should be tied firmly, so that it doesn't loosen or come off during the training session.

The ends of the belt should be of equal length, with both ends of the belt exiting the knot downwards. This reduces the chances of the belt to interfere with any movement or your hands or fingers getting caught in it.



**STEPS**

- Fold the belt exactly in half
- Wrap the middle of the belt around your waist making sure that the belt overlaps itself and does not cross one side over the other.
- Fold both ends across your waist and stick the top-most end under the two layers.
- Now fold the remaining end under the other end, now you should have a tight square knot.

**TIPS**

- Remember to start with both sides even.
- Wrap around your body once.
- Wrap one end UNDER the already-wrapped-around belt.
- Another way is: start w/ the belt in the middle of your waist, wrap it around your back and bring it back to the front, put the left side down, tuck the right side under both layers of the belt (so its against your stomach) and pull it up, then put the right end over the left and pull it through.
- Do NOT use excessive force when tying the belt, nor tie too snugly that you cut off your blood circulation.
- Never wrap a karate belt around any other part of your body except the waist (i.e. not around your neck). Doing so can be dangerous.