

Hapkido Statement of Philosophy

Decided Black Belt

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My First Semester as a Hapkido Instructor

During this past spring semester, I had the opportunity to be the instructor for the beginning Hapkido class at the University of Iowa. While I spent an hour twice a week teaching self-defense and basic white belt techniques, I also discovered that I learned quite a bit during the process. Among other things, it taught me the importance of pace and patience, while reinforcing my enjoyment of the martial art.

Pace is important on several different levels. First it is important to slow the techniques down when you are demonstrating them for the class initially. Decomposing a technique into discrete steps makes the technique easier to remember (for the beginning Hapkido student) and can provide insight into what makes a particular technique effective. The first step of many techniques is used to off-balance an attacker. By slowing down the pace of the technique the off-balancing angle can easily be seen. For example, the first step of the outside breaking balance moves an attacker backward and to the side at a 45-degree angle.

Secondly, pace is important once a technique has been learned. Once the discrete steps have been learned they can be integrated into one flowing motion. However, proper tempo must be maintained as rushing through the technique too quickly can compromise control and lead to injuries, while going too slow can allow the attacker to recover from the off-balancing and fend off the technique.

Finally, pace is important during an extended training session or during testing. Testing is more of a marathon than it is a sprint and it is helpful to keep that in mind during the test. If you go full tilt at the beginning, you will not have much energy left in you for the end. Since the latter part of a test tends to include pushing techniques, judo throws, one-step sparring, multiple attackers and other physically taxing technique demonstrations, it is imperative that you keep something in reserve that you can draw on in order to keep up the level of energy expected during testing.

Another invaluable lesson that being a Hapkido instructor taught me is the value of patience. Every beginning Hapkido student learns at their own pace and in their own way. While the techniques will begin to make sense for some of the students after you have demonstrated them several times, most students will need several weeks of actually practicing the techniques in class for initial understanding to be achieved. An effective instructor will have the patience to continually demonstrate the technique to the student struggling with the mechanics, but will also be able to show the techniques subtleties to those students who quickly grasp the fundamentals. Since I am one of those students who usually needs to see and practice a technique many times before it gets lodged in my muscle memory, I tend to empathize with those students who take just a little longer to absorb the techniques.

As an inexperienced instructor, you also need to have patience with yourself, and realize that you will make mistakes during class and occasionally be stumped by a

question from one of your students. Even after four and a half years of Hapkido, I will sometimes make a mistake during the demonstration of the basic white belt wave and realize (about two-thirds of the way through the technique) that I am too far away from my partner and the gradual locking of wrist, elbow and shoulder joints that should be occurring during the technique is not happening. If you are patient with yourself then that becomes a great teaching moment. The point that can be made to the students is that if the instructor makes this mistake then it is probably a fairly common error and one that they should watch for in their own technique.

Teaching Hapkido is a great way to reinforce your own enjoyment and understanding of the martial art. There is nothing quite like seeing that “a-ha” moment when the light goes on and your student begins to understand a technique. Equally as enjoyable is when you come up with a method of describing and demonstrating a technique for your students that also provides additional insight yourself. Continually improving and refining my Hapkido techniques is one of my goals and teaching is certainly a means to that end.

One of the most fulfilling things about teaching Hapkido is that you are teaching practical self-defense techniques that are applicable by students of all ages, abilities, sizes, and body types. For example, at 37 years old, my flexibility is definitely not what it was 15 or 20 years ago and so the prospect of using a high wheel kick to defend myself is not overly appealing. However, due to the diversity of the techniques taught in the Hapkido lesson program I am able to find a technique that is more in harmony with my strengths and use it effectively in a self-defense situation. Although not every student is going to continue on in Hapkido past the orange belt level, the variety of self-defense techniques (even for white belts) provides reasonable confidence that the student has the ability to defend themselves should the need arise.

Teaching Hapkido has been helpful in my overall development as a Hapkido practitioner. It has allowed me to examine the concept of pace as it relates to demonstrating and executing Hapkido techniques. Teaching has allowed me to understand the importance of patience as I teach students of varying ability and size. It has also taught me to be patient as my own Hapkido understanding evolves. Finally, teaching has enhanced my enjoyment of the martial art and allowed me to share that enjoyment with others.