

Martial art classes all over the world use a rank structure. Each system has their own belts and explanations on what they mean or how you get them. Notice I said get...not earn, we will cover that later. For many years people have complained about having to pay test fees in addition to their student dues. Here we will examine why there is testing, why there is fee and what some other systems do and/or charge for these testing's.

Why a student must test.

Students are tested to see if the sensei is teaching them correctly and if they are getting better at their training. We rank students by a Kyu rank, not their belt. The belt is a colorized symbol that makes it easy for instructors to know where a student is in their pathway to black belt. Each test the student is to show improvement, new skills and techniques and improvement in their dedication to martial arts. As you progress to higher rank the dedication is necessary. During the exam the student will gain new confidence in their abilities as well as being "truly" tested to see if they know them and can perform them at the level of the belt they are testing for. It is one of the greatest periods in a student's training when they earn that new belt.

Why we do not just give you a new belt like some other systems do.

In Aiki Te Ryu Karate we have chosen to have a formal testing for each student for the reasons stated above. I have trained and know of a few schools that just hand you a new belt one day as they deem fit. It is from my experience that handing the student a new belt is just not enough. They will always question if they are truly good enough to be that rank since they never had the chance to show they were. Most of the schools that hand out belts also promote rather quickly because they have little requirements for the belt levels. They are typically the schools that are neither financially stable nor does the instructor teach as a way of life but rather because they want to boost their ego.

Why we charge a test fee for belt examinations.

Testing fees are as old as the belt ranking system. When Jigoro Kano developed the first belt rank structure for Judo he charged a small fee. In Karate, the sensei would typically ask a donation be made to the dojo before the test. Sometimes it was food, cleaning supplies or other things both the Dojo and the Sensei needed. Students willingly gave these donations, not to get their new rank but rather to thank their Sensei for the knowledge that was parted on to them. In Aiki Te Ryu Karate we charge the same amount for test fees now as we did when we opened our first dojo in 1992. Test fees have never gone up but I am sure they will have to some day in order to help cover expenses. Our tradition is to use the profit from the test fees to purchase needed equipment, supplies and items for the dojo. So we have replaced students getting things for the dojo with a monetary amount so that we may purchase things for the dojo...interesting that we are still keeping up with the traditions huh. Test fees are relatively small at the lower ranks and progress to a pretty steep amount for black belt ranks which is completely justified since the higher the rank the longer and more preparation the Sensei has to take to get the test ready. The average profit of a yellow belt test is around \$18 after the belt and certificate are paid for. The average profit of a black belt test is \$56 after the uniform, certificate, registration fee and materials for the test are paid for. So you can see that if we did not charge fees we would lose money because of them. Any smart businessman will tell you that you NEVER lose money.

EARNING A BELT vs. getting a belt.

In many schools today they test students, charge a fee and promote them regardless of their ability. In Aiki Te Ryu we have had few students fail a test. We do not charge them to retake the test just for the new certificate (\$10). We will not offer testing to students who we deem not ready to move up in rank. The only way you fail is if you simply do not prepare and fail yourself. I have witnessed many students, at all rank levels, from many dojo that simply would not qualify to wear the same belt in our system. There are many reasons for this but the main one I feel is creating this problem is greed. Once they

realize that students will pay for testing and pay often they begin testing them every other month or every month. That is way to soon since most students are not ready to move up at that time. They may have their new kata learned, or can spar a little better but what about their moral and character development. If you test students to black belt to soon you are going to lose them anyway once they get bored after earning that belt. There are certain things a person has to go through along the path to black belt that are there to help them help the lower rank students when they go through the same things. Modern day McDojo Sensei do not know this because their Sensei came from the same rapid promotion type money greedy dojo as they are training in. I agree that you must make a profit but not at the expense of hurting your students...especially since many of them look up to you!

Test Fee Prices Vary...

Our testing fees are very little compared to both the local average and the national average. The national average is around \$80 per test fee for below black belt and around \$800 for black belt levels. In our area (30 miles) the average is \$50 per kyu rank and \$400 per black belt. Sometimes this makes me want to raise prices but to be honest why should I? We set great standards and our students become very good at martial arts because we do not focus on prices but rather quality of instruction. Our prices are set for a reason...so we do not have to worry about them...that's it! We would rather focus on teaching proper martial arts, make a little profit and have great black belts than on making a huge profit and having bad instructors and black belts.

All in all testing is great experience for the student. It is one of the best character building traits in martial arts since it helps them to gain confidence in their abilities. It teaches them that you must earn your rights in life rather than have them given to you. It is a great part of our system and it will never, ever change.