



The 8 Main Elements of a Typical Karate Class

Are you looking to join your local karate club or have you already taken the first step and signed up? If you haven't yet visited your local martial arts school, you're probably wondering what a typical karate class looks like. This article will break down the main elements of your standard karate class.

Obviously not every club will follow this format and within each martial arts school the weekly classes will also change but this is just meant to be a guide of what to expect in general. Classes also vary in length ranging from short 30 minute classes for young kids to 1 hour classes or longer for older kids, teenagers and adults. The following example is based on a one-hour class and not all of these elements will be covered in each lesson.

Formal etiquette

The majority of karate schools adhere to some kind of formal etiquette at the beginning and end of each class. This practice can be attributed to traditional Asian culture where bowing and formal chanting are often used to begin and end any type of structured activity. Depending on your chosen karate school you could see the full routine of formal etiquette including kneeling, multiple bows and the verbal recital of the school creed to a more laidback approach of an informal hand clap followed by the words, "Let's begin".

Warm-up and stretching

Before any type of physical activity it is highly recommended that you warm-up and stretch. It is often a good idea to end the activity with more stretching (sometimes called a warm-down). Karate is a very physical activity and so it should be obvious that a warm-up is an integral part of each lesson.

Practice of basic techniques

Right after the warm-up ends many karate classes begin with basic practice. This includes drilling stances, punches, kicks, blocks and strikes on the spot and up and down the floor with the focus being on multiple repetitions of the main techniques required for each rank level.

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Forms practice

Forms are pre-defined sequences of techniques that a practitioner must memorize. The forms are often a main requirement for each test and they help the practitioner to understand how different techniques fit together and integrate into sets of techniques. There are many different forms and each one has a set pattern with a central focus. They are often likened to the martial arts equivalent of a dance routine but most forms have accompanying application drills that show how each technique can be used against an opponent in a self-defense situation.

Short break

Depending on the length and intensity of each class, practitioners are often given the chance of a short water break.

Partner work drills

These types of drills are usually one of the fun parts of a karate class because the practitioners get to practice their techniques with an opponent to see how they are used and to drill appropriate reactions to different types of attacks. Partner work drills aren't always limited to two people but can often include multiple opponents or group training drills. This usually depends on the creativity of the instructor and the overall level of the class.

Pads and targets

An important part of karate training is to practice your techniques against different types of targets. These targets include soft or hard focus targets, body shields, hanging bags or the more popular free-standing Wavemasters, plastic sheets and even wooden boards from time to time. Pads and targets once again are usually a lot of fun for all involved and give you a real sense of what it feels like to actually strike a target.

Conditioning drills

This is really where your level of fitness can improve dramatically. Conditioning drills include running, jumping, push-ups, sit-ups, jumping jacks, star jumps, squats, relays, and any number of stamina-focused activities. Depending on the level of the class and the age group these drills are not always for the light-hearted but you did want to get a good workout, didn't you?

So in a nutshell a typical karate class will include some or all of these different elements.

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