

Preparing for the Cho Dan Bo Test

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Three years—three years (or maybe more) since you walked through the doors of the dojang and put on the all white uniform and belt of the newest student. You've struggled with understanding the blocks and attacks, kicks and forms, 1-steps, self-defense moves, and worked to perfect your sparring. In a certain sense, putting on that white belt was your first rite of passage in Tang Soo Do—now you face your next.

There's a reason the red belt is called the 1st gup. It signals that you've reached the top rung, the 1st rung, on the colored belt ladder. Now the time has come to take the next step, to trade the colored trim you've worn since green belt for a uniform that once again is all white and start on the final path to Black Belt. But first, you have to navigate the Cho Dan Bo test. Just as the all white uniform signifies new beginnings, the test is not like previous tests you've been through. You must demonstrate your knowledge of Tang Soo Do, both physical and intellectual, to a panel of judges—the traditional Shim Sah. The test is not a recital, or a celebration, it is a test—how you perform that night before that panel determines whether you wear the blue belt, or are invited to repeat your performance at the next test. In keeping with the spirit of the test, not all candidates succeed their first time, in fact about half are given additional time to further hone their knowledge.

Preparation for the test is mostly the responsibility of the individual (but not entirely), and involves both physical and mental training. Remember the 14 attitude requirements in your gup manual. All are applicable for the CDB test, but several in particular are instructive; know the theory and philosophy, practice techniques already learned, and regularly spaced practice sessions. You should know all the techniques you need to know at this point, but you have to demonstrate not only that you know the technique, but also that you understand how to apply the technique. Just walking through punches in drill won't be enough; you have to show that the punch would work, that you see the opponent in your mind's eye. In your forms, each attack and defense must be purposeful and executed to the best of your ability. In your 1-steps and self-defense you must show that you understand how the technique is designed to work and execute it effectively.

To hone your knowledge to that level, you must practice and you must practice regularly. The test is physically rigorous; it's designed to help you find your own performance envelope and go beyond it. For most candidates, attendance at only the two normal class times is not sufficient preparation. The special CDB class on Saturday mornings is intended to specifically prepare candidates for CDB and Black Belt testing and should be attended regularly as part of your preparation. While you are responsible for your own preparation, you can, and should, call upon others in the studio to help you. Perfect practice of the wrong technique results in a well-honed wrong technique. Seek out one of the Black Belts to watch your forms, or practice jump kicks with you. Better yet, get an early start on the mentor program by picking a mentor to work with. Speak with your instructor about stepping out of regular class time to work on technique, or just to work on conditioning. Chances are, they'll

be able to assign a senior rank to work with you. Don't forget the people that will be testing with you. As the old saying goes, "There's strength in numbers," and working together as a team to prepare can be extremely rewarding.

Preparing intellectually and emotionally for the test is, in many ways, just as important as the physical preparation. Some time back you showed your dedication to the art, and determination to persevere until successful, when you joined the Black Belt Club. You will, of course, have studied your manual and GrandMaster Shin's first three books in preparation for the written test (just as in the Dan test, failure on the written test automatically requires that you test again), and have carefully prepared your essay (see previous article on writing the Dan essay). The Cho Dan Bo test, however, is a test of more than just book knowledge and physical prowess—it also tests your ability to demonstrate the seven tenets in practice. Do you show integrity, concentration, and perseverance in your performance? Have you shown respect, self-control, humility, and indomitable spirit in how you handled the test itself? To do so requires intense mental and emotional preparation culminating in your performance that day. By the time the test day actually arrives, you should have rehearsed every aspect of the test in your mind dozens of times. You will have felt how you will draw the energy you will need from your fellow candidates, and how you will support their needs on the floor. You'll know how you'll hold the target for your partner for jump kicks so they can excel, and how you'll be able to rely on them to ensure your 1-steps are displayed to their best advantage.

So now the test day itself is here. You've carefully prepared all the required documentation listed in the preparation pack received from your instructor, and passed your written test. You've trained hard, asked for help where you needed it, and prepared yourself mentally and emotionally. What can you expect? To begin with, you will engage in one of the most traditional rituals of the martial arts—you will clean the dojang working as a team with your fellow candidates, a group that will usually number from 4-6. You will set-up the testing panel's tables and chairs, and have your data entered into the tracking system used to chart Cho Dan Bo progress.

CDB Test Preparation Checklist:

- Join the Black Belt Club**
- Regular class attendance**
- Saturday CDB Preparation Class**
- Independent training**
- Work with others**
- Learn the theory and philosophy for proper execution**
- Review all you have learned – study**
- Carefully prepare your essay**
- Ensure all documentation is in order**
- Prepare mentally and emotionally**
- Select a mentor**

Then the test itself will begin with the traditional beginning ritual, which, of course, you will know perfectly in well-dictioned Korean if asked. You will face a panel of usually 5 or 6 Sam Dans, occasionally joined by Master Vaughn and maybe a special guest master, and will enjoy the ministrations of a senior E Dan as test conductor. Don't expect smiles and glad hands on the back urging you on, before and during the test itself. You're past that now; this test is about how well you can demonstrate what you know and you must look within you for your answers. The panel and the conductor won't help you.

You will be judged on how well you perform given what can reasonably be expected of you. That means that as a 45-year-old mother of 4, you will not be expected to jump as high on

the jump kicks as a 17-year-old teenager. You will be expected to know how to execute that jump kick, and demonstrate that to the best of your ability. You will do all the forms you have learned, not just the new ones you learned for the test, and you will need to execute Sae Kye Hyung Il Bu with the same level of intensity and effectiveness as Bassai or Naihanchi Cho Dan. One-steps and self-defense must be properly executed, effective, and result in you being in control. If that means a takedown, then an appropriate breakfall is expected. Sparring must demonstrate technique and control.

Your mental and emotional discipline plays an important role as well. How you cope with a missed form, a 1-step that suddenly isn't there, an aggressive sparring partner, or a missed break is as important as the magnificent kick technique you displayed during drill. The test is a pressure-cooker; you very likely will feel at some point that you're not going to make it. Students have come unwound during the test as their emotions take over and supersede all the hard physical training they've gone through. Confidence in yourself, your fellow candidates, and in your training should help you through those times. But it's here that your mental and emotional preparation for the test proves itself.

The test is over, you're exhausted mentally and physically, the test panel has made their comments, the session has been formally closed, and the panel has retreated into the office to discuss the results. After your family and friends have congratulated you on going through something none of them could really know, it's time for some reflection. You know where you could have done better; a form not executed as well as you would have liked, a 1-step you walked through because you weren't quite certain about it, the jump kick you pulled back on because your legs felt like rubber, the swell of emotion during the 2-on-1 sparring match, or the ache in your hand from the speed break that didn't go. Of course, there will be the question—did I pass? But that's not the right question. The right question is an internal question you ask yourself—am I really ready to take this step? The actual outcome of the test really doesn't matter. That's more a question of timing. You will take that step, if not this time, then the next, or the next after that. If it's to be this time, you'll be invited to the next Black Belt class to receive your new rank. If it's to be the next time, somebody from the test panel will discuss your test with you and plans for preparation.

Once you've taken the step, a new world opens before you, and preparation begins for the next, and even bigger rite of passage in Tang Soo Do—the Dan test. You'll get there too.