



Elemental Kickboxing Leeds Grading Criteria & Guidance

All gradings are marked by a registered instructor with a minimum grade of 1st dan black belt from the Elemental Kickboxing Leeds, or affiliate when necessary.

Marking Categories

See below marking criteria for belt gradings at the Elemental Kickboxing Leeds.

1. Technique

The technical ability is marked out of 10. The mark given can be up to 1 decimal place. 80% of this mark is completed by observations completed during line work, 20% of this mark is completed by observations completed during throughout parts 2, 3 and 4 (when applicable for the graded belt level)

Martial arts line work, whether in the form of kata (in traditional martial arts like karate) or combinations/drills (in disciplines like kickboxing), requires a combination of physical, mental, and technical attributes to perform effectively. Here are some key attributes necessary for martial arts line work:

Technique and Form: Mastery of fundamental techniques, including strikes, blocks, kicks, and stances, is essential for executing line work accurately and effectively. Practitioners must focus on proper form, alignment, and execution to maximize the effectiveness of each movement.

Precision and Timing: Martial arts line work demands precision and timing in the execution of techniques. Practitioners must develop the ability to coordinate their movements precisely, maintaining correct timing and rhythm throughout the sequence.

Focus and Concentration: Concentration is crucial during line work to maintain awareness of body positioning, technique, and breathing. Practitioners must stay focused and present, avoiding distractions and maintaining mental clarity throughout the performance.

Breathing Control: Controlled breathing is integral to martial arts line work, helping to regulate energy, enhance focus, and optimize performance. Practitioners synchronize their breathing with each movement, exhaling on exertion and inhaling during relaxation phases.

Body Awareness and Control: Line work requires a high level of body awareness and control. Practitioners must develop proprioception—the sense of the body's position and movement in space—to execute techniques accurately and efficiently.

Flexibility and Mobility: Flexibility and mobility are essential for performing martial arts line work with fluidity and ease. Practitioners must maintain adequate joint mobility and flexibility to achieve full range of motion in their techniques and transitions.

Strength and Endurance: Line work can be physically demanding, requiring strength and endurance to sustain proper form and technique throughout the performance. Strength training and conditioning exercises help develop the physical attributes necessary for martial arts line work.

Adaptability and Creativity: While traditional forms (kata) often follow a predetermined sequence, practitioners should also cultivate adaptability and creativity in their line work. This allows for variations, improvisations, and the ability to respond effectively to different scenarios and opponents.

Discipline and Dedication: Martial arts line work requires discipline and dedication to achieve mastery. Practitioners must commit to regular training, practice diligently, and strive for continuous improvement in their skills and performance.

Resilience and Perseverance: Setbacks and challenges are inevitable in martial arts training. Practitioners must cultivate resilience and perseverance, learning from failures, overcoming obstacles, and persisting in their pursuit of excellence.

2. Defensive Work

The defensive ability is marked out of 10. The mark given can be up to 1 decimal place. 80% of this mark is completed by observations completed during two step partner work, 20% of this mark is completed by observations completed during throughout parts 1, 3 and 4 (when applicable for the graded belt level)

Martial arts defensive work demands a unique set of attributes that enable practitioners to effectively protect themselves from attacks while remaining calm, composed, and in control of the situation. Here are some key attributes required for martial arts defensive work:

Awareness and Alertness: Being aware of one's surroundings and potential threats is essential for effective defense. Practitioners must maintain a high level of alertness, paying attention to the actions and movements of potential attackers.

Timing and Distance Management: Effective defensive techniques require precise timing and the ability to manage distance effectively. Practitioners must anticipate attacks, maintain the appropriate distance from the opponent, and execute defensive maneuvers with impeccable timing.

Reaction Speed: Quick reflexes and reaction speed are crucial for intercepting and countering attacks effectively. Practitioners must develop the ability to respond swiftly to incoming threats, whether it be strikes, grabs, or takedowns.

Body Control and Coordination: Martial arts defensive work demands excellent body control and coordination to execute techniques with precision and efficiency. Practitioners must develop a keen

sense of proprioception—the awareness of their body's position and movement—to evade attacks and execute defensive manoeuvres effectively.

Footwork and Mobility: Agility and footwork are essential for evading attacks, repositioning oneself, and creating opportunities for counterattacks. Practitioners must develop dynamic footwork and mobility to move quickly and decisively in response to changing situations.

Stamina and Endurance: Defensive encounters can be physically demanding, requiring stamina and endurance to sustain defensive efforts over an extended period. Practitioners must develop cardiovascular fitness and endurance through regular training and conditioning.

Adaptability and Versatility: Effective defence requires the ability to adapt to different attack scenarios and opponents. Practitioners must be versatile in their defensive techniques, able to respond to a variety of strikes, grabs, and holds with appropriate defences.

Confidence and Mental Toughness: Confidence in one's abilities and mental toughness are crucial for remaining calm and composed under pressure. Practitioners must cultivate confidence in their defensive skills through consistent training and practice, enabling them to respond effectively to threats without hesitation or doubt.

Strategic Thinking and Problem-Solving: Defensive work often involves strategic thinking and problem-solving to neutralize threats and gain the upper hand. Practitioners must analyse the situation, identify vulnerabilities in the opponent's attacks, and choose the most appropriate defensive responses.

Emotional Control and Discipline: Martial arts defensive work requires emotional control and discipline to remain focused and composed during high-stress situations. Practitioners must manage fear, anger, and other emotions effectively, maintaining a clear mind and making rational decisions under pressure.

3. Kata Forms

The kata form performances are marked out of 10. The mark given can be up to 1 decimal place. 100% of this mark is completed by observations completed during their kata form performance.

Martial arts kata forms work, also known simply as kata, requires a combination of physical, mental, and technical attributes to perform with precision, grace, and effectiveness. Here are the key attributes required for martial arts kata forms work:

Technique and Form: Mastery of fundamental techniques, including strikes, blocks, kicks, stances, and transitions, is essential for executing kata with precision and accuracy. Practitioners must focus on proper form, alignment, and execution of each movement.

Precision and Timing: Kata demands precision and timing in the execution of techniques. Practitioners must coordinate their movements precisely, maintaining correct timing, rhythm, and flow throughout the sequence.

Focus and Concentration: Concentration is crucial during kata practice to maintain awareness of body positioning, technique, and breathing. Practitioners must stay focused and present, avoiding distractions and maintaining mental clarity throughout the performance.

Breathing Control: Controlled breathing is integral to kata practice, helping to regulate energy, enhance focus, and optimize performance. Practitioners synchronize their breathing with each movement, exhaling on exertion and inhaling during relaxation phases.

Body Awareness and Control: Kata requires a high level of body awareness and control. Practitioners must develop proprioception—the sense of the body's position and movement in space—to execute techniques accurately and efficiently.

Flexibility and Mobility: Flexibility and mobility are essential for performing kata with fluidity and ease. Practitioners must maintain adequate joint mobility and flexibility to achieve full range of motion in their techniques and transitions.

Muscle Memory and Repetition: Kata forms work involves extensive repetition to develop muscle memory and refine technique. Practitioners must practice kata regularly, committing the movements to memory and ingraining them into their muscle memory through repetition.

Expression and Interpretation: Kata allows practitioners to express themselves artistically through their movements and interpretation of the form. While adhering to traditional techniques, practitioners may add their own flair and interpretation to kata performances, showcasing their individual style and personality.

Emotional Connection: Kata practice goes beyond mere physical movements; it requires an emotional connection to the form and its underlying principles. Practitioners must understand the purpose and meaning behind each technique, embodying the spirit and intent of the kata in their performance.

Respect and Tradition: Kata practice is steeped in tradition and carries a sense of respect for the art and its lineage. Practitioners must approach kata practice with humility, reverence, and a deep appreciation for the history and heritage of their martial art.

4. Sparring

The sparring ability is marked out of 10. The mark given can be up to 1 decimal place. 100% of this mark is completed by observations completed when sparring.

Martial arts contact sparring, whether it's in disciplines like karate, taekwondo, Muay Thai, or mixed martial arts (MMA), requires a unique set of attributes to engage effectively in controlled combat with an opponent. Here are the key attributes required for martial arts contact sparring work:

Technical Proficiency: Mastery of fundamental striking, kicking, blocking, and defensive techniques is essential for effective sparring. Practitioners must be proficient in executing techniques with precision, speed, and accuracy while maintaining proper form and control.

Physical Fitness: Contact sparring demands a high level of physical fitness, including strength, agility, speed, endurance, and flexibility. Practitioners must train their bodies to perform at peak levels during intense and dynamic sparring exchanges.

Strategic Thinking: Sparring involves strategic thinking and tactical decision-making to outmanoeuvre and outsmart opponents. Practitioners must analyse their opponent's movements, identify openings, and choose the most effective techniques and combinations to gain the upper hand.

Timing and Distance Management: Effective sparring requires precise timing and the ability to manage distance effectively. Practitioners must gauge the timing of attacks and counters, as well as control the distance to engage or disengage from the opponent strategically.

Footwork and Mobility: Agility, footwork, and mobility are crucial for evading attacks, creating angles, and setting up offensive opportunities. Practitioners must develop dynamic footwork and movement patterns to navigate the sparring space effectively and maintain positional advantage.

Adaptability and Versatility: Sparring encounters are unpredictable and dynamic, requiring practitioners to adapt to changing situations and opponents. Practitioners must be versatile in their techniques, able to switch between offensive and defensive strategies seamlessly.

Resilience and Mental Toughness: Contact sparring can be physically and mentally demanding, requiring resilience and mental toughness to withstand strikes, maintain focus, and push through fatigue. Practitioners must cultivate mental fortitude, staying composed and determined even under pressure.

Control and Discipline: Contact sparring requires control and discipline to maintain safety and prevent injury to oneself and one's training partners. Practitioners must strike with controlled force and precision, adhering to the rules and guidelines of the sparring environment.

Sportsmanship and Respect: Sparring promotes sportsmanship, camaraderie, and mutual respect between opponents. Practitioners must approach sparring with humility, respect for their opponents, and a commitment to fair play, regardless of the outcome.

Continuous Learning and Improvement: Sparring is an ongoing learning process that requires dedication to continuous improvement. Practitioners must seek feedback, learn from their experiences, and refine their skills through regular training and sparring sessions.

5. Physical Fitness

The physical fitness elemental is marked out of 10. The mark can be given up to 1 decimal place. 100% of this mark is completed throughout the entire duration of the grading, however specific tasks will be set to test the participants physical capabilities.

Martial arts physical fitness encompasses a range of attributes that are essential for optimal performance and overall health in martial arts training and practice. Here are the key attributes required for martial arts physical fitness:

Strength: Building strength in both upper and lower body muscles is crucial for executing techniques with power and control, as well as for injury prevention. Strength training exercises such as weightlifting, bodyweight exercises, and resistance training help develop muscular strength.

Endurance: Endurance is the ability to sustain physical activity over an extended period. Martial arts training often involves prolonged periods of exertion, making cardiovascular endurance essential for maintaining performance throughout a training session or competition. Cardiovascular exercises such as running, cycling, and swimming help improve endurance.

Flexibility: Flexibility is vital for executing techniques with full range of motion, improving mobility, and reducing the risk of injury. Stretching exercises, yoga, and mobility drills help increase flexibility and range of motion in joints and muscles.

Speed: Speed is crucial for delivering fast and effective strikes, evading opponents' attacks, and reacting swiftly during sparring or combat situations. Speed training drills, agility exercises, and plyometric exercises help improve reaction time and overall speed.

Agility: Agility is the ability to move quickly and gracefully, changing direction and position with ease. Agility training drills such as ladder drills, cone drills, and agility ladder exercises help improve coordination, balance, and quickness in movement.

Coordination: Coordination is essential for executing complex movements and techniques accurately and efficiently. Martial arts training enhances hand-eye coordination, footwork coordination, and overall body coordination through repetitive practice and drills.

Balance: Balance is crucial for maintaining stability and control during martial arts techniques and movements. Balance training exercises such as single-leg exercises, stability ball exercises, and balance board drills help improve proprioception and stability.

Reaction Time: Reaction time is the ability to respond quickly to stimuli or cues, such as an opponent's attack during sparring. Reaction time training drills, reflex exercises, and reaction ball drills help improve reaction time and responsiveness.

Power: Power is the ability to generate force quickly and explosively, which is essential for delivering strong strikes and takedowns in martial arts. Power training exercises such as plyometrics, medicine ball exercises, and explosive strength training drills help improve power output.

Mental Toughness: Martial arts physical fitness also requires mental toughness, resilience, and discipline to push through fatigue, overcome challenges, and stay focused during training and competition. Mental training techniques such as visualization, meditation, and positive self-talk help develop mental toughness and concentration.

6. Conduct

The other elemental is marked out of 10. The mark can be given up to 1 decimal place. 100% of this mark is completed throughout the entire duration of the grading.

Good martial arts conduct encompasses a set of attributes and principles that govern a practitioner's behaviour both inside and outside the training environment. These attributes contribute to fostering a positive and respectful martial arts community while promoting personal growth and development. Here are the key attributes required for good martial arts conduct:

Respect: Respect for oneself, instructors, training partners, opponents, and the martial arts discipline itself is fundamental in martial arts. Practitioners must show respect by bowing, using proper titles, and treating others with courtesy and dignity.

Humility: Humility involves acknowledging one's strengths and weaknesses without arrogance or vanity. Martial artists should remain humble, open to learning from others, and willing to accept constructive feedback to improve their skills.

Integrity: Integrity is the adherence to moral and ethical principles, honesty, and consistency in behaviour. Martial artists must demonstrate integrity by upholding the values and traditions of their martial art, acting with honesty and fairness, and maintaining high ethical standards.

Discipline: Discipline is the ability to control one's actions, behaviours, and impulses in pursuit of personal and martial arts goals. Practitioners should cultivate discipline through regular training, adherence to rules and guidelines, and self-control in all aspects of their lives.

Sportsmanship: Sportsmanship involves displaying fairness, respect, and graciousness in victory and defeat. Martial artists should compete with integrity, show respect for opponents, and accept outcomes with dignity, regardless of the result.

Self-Control: Self-control is the ability to regulate one's emotions, impulses, and reactions, especially in high-pressure situations. Practitioners must demonstrate self-control by remaining calm, composed, and focused during training, sparring, and real-world encounters.

Empathy: Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings and perspectives of others. Martial artists should show empathy towards training partners, instructors, and opponents, demonstrating compassion, understanding, and support.

Courage: Courage is the willingness to face challenges, confront fears, and overcome obstacles in pursuit of personal and martial arts goals. Martial artists should cultivate courage by stepping out of their comfort zones, taking risks, and embracing adversity with determination and resilience.

Leadership: Leadership involves inspiring and guiding others by setting a positive example, demonstrating integrity, and promoting teamwork and camaraderie within the martial arts community. Practitioners should strive to be role models and mentors for fellow students, fostering a supportive and inclusive training environment.

Continuous Improvement: Martial artists should embrace a mindset of continuous improvement, seeking to refine their skills, expand their knowledge, and grow as individuals both on and off the mat. Practitioners should be open to learning from instructors, peers, and experiences, always striving to reach their full potential.

The Scoring System

The final numerical mark

The final numerical mark given is a numerical number calculated by adding all the categories final marks together. See maximum mark per belt below.

White - Technique | Defensive | Physical Fitness (30)

Yellow - Technique | Defensive | Sparring (Shadow Fighting only) | Physical Fitness | Other (50)

Orange - Technique | Defensive | Sparring (Shadow Fighting only) | Physical Fitness | Other (50)

Red - Technique | Defensive | Kata Form (Set) | Sparring (Shadow Fighting only) | Physical Fitness | Other (60)

Green – Technique | Defensive | Kata Form (Set) | Sparring (Shadow Fighting only) | Physical Fitness | Other (60)

Junior Purple - Technique | Defensive | Kata Form (Set) | Sparring (Shadow Fighting only) | Physical Fitness | Other (60)

Senior Purple - Technique | Defensive | Kata Form (Set) | Sparring (Shadow Fighting only) | Physical Fitness | Other (60)

Junior Blue - Technique | Defensive | Kata Form (Choreographed) | Sparring (Shadow Fighting only) | Physical Fitness | Other (60)

Senior Blue - Technique | Defensive | Kata Form (Choreographed) | Sparring (Shadow Fighting only) | Physical Fitness | Other (60)

Junior Brown - Technique | Defensive | Kata Form (Choreographed / Music) | Sparring (Shadow Fighting only) | Physical Fitness | Other (60)

Brown II – Technique | Defensive | Kata Form (Choreographed / Music) | Sparring (Shadow Fighting only) | Physical Fitness | Other (60)

Senior Brown - Technique | Defensive | Kata Form (Choreographed / Music) | Sparring (Shadow Fighting only) | Physical Fitness | Other (60)

The Final Percentage Mark

The final percentage mark given is a percentage calculated using the total potential numerical mark per belt level, multiplied by the final numerical mark. This figure will provide the examiner with a final percentage mark and determine if the participant grading has received a failure, compensable, pass, merit, or distinction.

The Final Percentage Boundaries

Fail <49.9%

A failure mark is awarded to participants when completing their grading to a unsatisfactory standard.

Compensable

A compensable mark may be awarded to a participant at the examiner's discretion. Such instances can occur because of a participant not completing their grading and receiving a mark within these boundaries due to injury or other emergency. In such instances, the participant could apply to regrade.

Pass 50.0% – 79.9%

A pass mark is awarded to participants when completing their grading to a satisfactory standard.

Merit 80.0% - 89.9%

A merit mark is awarded to participants when completing their grading to a high standard.

Distinction 90.0% - 100.0%

A distinction mark is awarded to participants when completing their grading to a superior standard.

At Elemental Kickboxing Leeds, we understand that the final mark you receive is more than just a number. It represents your hard work, dedication, and growth throughout your journey. However, we also recognise that a mark alone may not provide a comprehensive understanding of your performance and areas for improvement.

That's why we value qualitative feedback from examiners and provide more specific information of what your mark means above. We believe that personalised comments and constructive criticism offer invaluable insights that can guide you towards your training goals and help you further develop your skills, and encourage all participants grading to speak with their examiner for personalised feedback.