

To AJKA-International  
AJKA-I of PA  
Instructor Trainee's Report #19

Subject: **“Blocking Techniques”**

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The main purpose of an *uke-waza*, or blocking technique, is to protect oneself from an attack. However, in karate blocking can serve many purposes. Accordingly, the body actions used and the course through which the limbs travel during any particular block can vary as a result of that purpose.

Obviously, the overall purpose of blocking is defense – as master Gichen Funakoshi stated in Shoto Niju Kun, "karate ni sente nashi - No initiative attack in Karate", therefore one blocks in order to deflect an attack. This rule is made clear by simply looking at the Shotokan kata. None of the 26 kata begin with an offensive technique, instead all of them start with a block.

Except in the case of a surprise attack wherein the most primitive self-defense reaction is provoked, blocking is rarely simple. Blocks can have several uses. All blocks can be used as an attack; that is, as a blow which impacts the attacking limb so strongly that it discourages further attacks. One can block-and-counter, advancing on an attacker while blocking in order to deliver an attack. One can use a block as a means of unbalancing an attacker, either setting them up for an attack, or rendering them harmless. Finally, one can block and retreat – either to adjust one's distance and timing for an attack of one's own or to allow the attacker to retreat.

In Shotokan, blocking can be accomplished by using arm or leg techniques. Also, you can use one handed blocks (*sekiwan-uke*) or two handed blocks (*rowan-uke*). The most common *uke-waza* used in Shotokan are:

*Age-uke* – rising block  
*Gedan-barai* – downward block  
*Ude-uke* – forearm block  
*Uchi-uke* – inside block  
*Shuto-uke* – knife hand block  
*Morote-uke* – augmented forearm block (two handed block)

The body actions one employs while blocking are dependent upon the particular block used – which is dependent upon whichever of the above tactics are in use. In general, however, most hard blocks utilize at least expansion/contraction and a form of rotation. Outside forearm block (*soto uke*) uses direct rotation while inside forearm block (*uchi uke*) uses reverse rotation.

Obviously, downward block (*geden barai*) not only uses reverse rotation, but also lowering. Likewise, rising block (*age uke*) uses reverse rotation in addition to rising. All, of course, employ expansion/contraction. Sweeping blocks also benefit from these various body actions, but their use is more subtle.

Reaction-force comes into play while blocking in two separate ways: upon impact and during rotation. Hard blocks directly collide with the attacking limb and since the defender's core contracts while the limbs expand, this produces the state of "body connection". This, in turn, effectively increases the mass of the blocking limb – which causes the attacking limb to experience greater acceleration – resulting in greater damage.

In the case of sweeping or scooping blocks (*sukui uke*), the "impact" when touching the attacking limb is often minor. The contact made is just enough to provide a slanting trajectory to the thrust of the attacking limb.

The other manner in which reaction-force is utilized in blocking is by rotation. As the block rotates about an axis (either the spine or the hips) it adds force to a technique. In the case of a hard block, the cutting action is augmented by the retraction of the draw hand. This moves the blocking limb forward with additional power.

In addition, to the above factors, most blocks exhibit several other features. These are: (a) forearm rotation, (b) elbow position, and (c) final position of the arm. All play a part in determining the effectiveness of the block.

Just as the forearm's cutting action during a block is enhanced by the rotation of the hips, so is its impact against the attacking limb increased if it is rotated while bringing it into position. If in addition to the rising, lowering, or crossing of the forearm it is also rotated into position it will result in greater impact and greater damage to the attacking limb.

The elbow's position during a block is also important. If the elbow is kept too close to the body, the range of movement of the forearm is decreased, resulting in diminished speed and force. If the elbow is kept too far from the body, the ability to "make connection" is forfeited and, while the forearm's speed does not lessen, its effective mass is diminished and the force generated by the striking surface is reduced.

The final position of the block is also critical. One's block must cover the intended target of the attacking limb. A rising block (*age uke*) must rise sufficiently so as to prevent the head from being struck. A forearm block (either *soto uke* or *uchi uke*) must cross the body far enough to prevent damage to same. If this is not accomplished there is really no point to the block. However, one must guard against over blocking. If one's blocking limb rises, crosses, or lowers too far outside the body frame it can result in one being out of position for either a counter attack or the next block.

Most karate blocks are done with the hand and the area of the forearm near the wrist. Considering this, karate-ka should do many blocking actions with a partner in order to condition their hands and forearms. Karate-ka should be able to release fast, sharp, well-timed blocks in quick combinations with sufficient power to halt the strongest attack. This only comes from actual application. As Master Funakoshi stated, "Karate is like hot water, if you do not give it heat constantly it will again become cold water."

When blocking it is important to remember:

- Always keep your feet flat and planted on the floor in a balanced position
- Keep the head and body upright in good posture
- The prep or set up movements just before doing the block are initiated by tightening the muscles, but the shoulders and the arms should remain soft and loose<sup>1</sup>
- The block should be executed in a smooth manner and the arm tension should occur until the very last moment.
- Last second rotation of the wrists produces a whip like snap to the action
- You should exhale as the block is completed so that kime or focus is achieved.

As Sensei Rumick says, “blocking is for beginners – that is why it starts with the letter ‘B’”. As you advance, you will block less and instead use deflective techniques to set yourself up to attack.

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<sup>1</sup> I need to work on this one a lot!