



VAUGHN'S DOJANG

Black Belt (& Cho Dan Bo) Essay Guidelines



It's January, and you have just received the letter informing you that you are under consideration for the April Dan test. Thoughts turn towards the upcoming maintenance test and physical preparation for scrutiny by the testing committee. If you have been truly invested in your journey toward Black Belt, you have also been thinking about that other critical piece of work that needs tended to, the Black Belt essay. If you have not started the essay, you had better start very soon. Note that much of the following applies equally to the Black Belt essay and the Cho Dan Bo essay.

Not many people realize just how important the essay is to preparation for Black Belt. Tang Soo Do is a traditional martial art that emphasizes all aspects of mental, physical, and even spiritual growth and development. The ability to engage in a scholarly activity, research a topic, and clearly communicate ideas and concepts is part of the mental discipline of our art. Each essay is read and evaluated by the testing committee, Grandmaster Vaughn, and ultimately, Grandmaster Strong. Therefore, it pays to spend the time to carefully prepare your essay, no matter what level of Black Belt you are being considered for.

Your essay must be completed far enough in advance of your Black Belt Pre-Test (held during Maintenance Testing) so that there is sufficient time for your instructor/mentor, a member of the Testing Committee, and Grandmaster Vaughn to review it and return it to you for corrections. **The final corrected version of the essay is due at the time of the Pre-Test. Failure to submit your final essay at this time will result in you having to wait until the next test cycle before having the opportunity to be invited to participate in Black Belt testing.** For Cho Dan Bo candidates, the final edited version of the essay is due no later than the date of the Cho Dan Bo physical test.

What follows are a few guidelines regarding essays based on our experience reading and editing lots of your pithy prose. This also assumes most essays today are being written on word processing software like Microsoft Word or Google Docs.

- Choose your topic wisely. It should relate to your experience with Tang Soo Do and involve some level of research. Students often write about what Tang Soo Do means to them—the difference that it has made in their life and to their personal development. Another common topic is something similar to, “The Seven Tenets of Tang Soo Do and Me.” Just reciting the text of the tenets in the manual with an added sentence to the effect of, “respecting my parents is a good thing,” will not suffice. Spend some time, research what “respect” means, and then really relate it to your life experience in Tang Soo Do. The more personal you can make your statement, the more alive it will be to the audience. The Cho Dan Bo essay must be a minimum of 500 words; most essays end up between 500 and 1000 words. The required length of the Black Belt essay depends on what rank you are testing for—refer to the Gup or Dan manual.

NOTE: If you are testing for E Dan or higher rank, the subject of your essay cannot be the 5 Codes, the 7 Tenets, or the 14 Attitude Requirements.

- Once you start to put fingers to keyboard (modern version of “pen to paper”), start with the proper format and save everybody a lot of time later:
 - 12 pt., Times New Roman or Arial font, double-spaced
 - At the beginning of the first page, include the following (each on a separate line):
 - Your name
 - Rank

- Age
 - Gup/Dan number
 - Word count
 - Title of your essay (in **Bold**, center justified on the page)
 - Use page numbering, center justified in the Footer at the bottom of each page
 - Always close your essay with “Respectfully Submitted – your name”
- Do not add excess verbiage just to increase the word count. Clear succinct writing is much preferred over unnecessary adjectives, pronouns, or gratuitous phrases. If you are under the required count, think a little harder about what more you can say. If you are over the count, go back and see if you can make your writing more concise.
 - In today’s world of rapid communication, email, text, chats, etc. a new lexicon for abbreviation has crept into the vernacular. Do not write your essay like you are texting your friends. Wrtg lke ths jst wnt do it 4 u. Remember, this is a scholarly piece of work that Grandmaster Strong will ultimately read.
 - Watch your use of pronouns. When referring to a person, the proper pronoun is “who,” not “that” or “which.” The most common pronoun error is using a plural pronoun to refer to a singular noun. For example: “I try to judge each student on their effort”. Here, the noun—student—is singular, while the pronoun—their—is plural. The correct sentence reads, “I try to judge each student on his or her own effort”. This particular error is the most common one we see when editing essays.
 - The word “that” is the most overused word in all essays. In most instances, the word can be eliminated without changing the meaning, and, oftentimes, eliminating the word makes for a smoother read. Example: “I find that when I am walking at night that I tend to look around if the noise that I heard is nearby.” This sentence works better as: “I find when I am walking at night, I tend to look around to see if the noise I heard is nearby.”
 - Pay attention to punctuation. Clauses starting with “when”, “if”, “although”, etc. require a comma after the clause. Two independent clauses separated by “and” or “but” require a comma before the “and” or “but”.
 - Please, please, please have others review and edit your work before you submit it—in particular your instructor and mentor. It only makes good sense to have somebody else review your work. Do not rely on spell check to catch all errors. Common mistakes missed by spell check: it’s vs. its; their vs. they’re vs. there, know vs. no, marital vs. martial, and many more.

You may submit your essay on or before the requested date electronically via an email attachment to the test committee (Masters Rosenkrans or Lipstein), in fact this would be preferred if possible. If not, submit two printed copies on or before the required date. For the Cho Dan Bo essay, submit it electronically to your instructor.

Once received, the test committee will review and make edits on your paper, then Grandmaster Vaughn will do the same. If submitted electronically, you may receive your essay with edits marked electronically using the “Tracked Changes” feature in Word. Otherwise, your essay will be returned with the customary editor’s marks. Please review and incorporate indicated changes, then submit two fresh copies with your testing materials in your testing envelope.

Prepared by: Master Wayne A. Rosenkrans, Jr., Ph.D., Oh Dan
 Master Sandy Lipstein, Oh Dan
 Mr. Rick Mentley, Sah Dan