

## Physical Standard in Taekwon-Do - does it really matter?

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This essay is to fulfil the requirements for my FifthDan grading.

To be asked the question, “Does a physical standard matter for Taekwon-Do?”, my first response is yes of course it does. Unfortunately this answer does not quite meet the requirements of the essay.

So I must look a little deeper.

First of all what is Taekwon-Do? To start with we are told it is a Korean form of unarmed self-defence and the translation is “foot fist way”. Then looking just a little deeper we find a larger definition from General Choi Hong Hi (the founder of the International Taekwon-Do federation (ITF)),

*Taekwon-Do is a version of unarmed combat designed for the purpose of self-defence. It is more than just that however. It is the scientific use of the body in the method of self-defence; aiming to gain the ultimate use of one's body through intensive physical and mental training. Though it is a martial art, its discipline, techniques and mental training are the mortar for building a strong sense of justice, fortitude, humility and resolve. It is this mental conditioning that separates the true practitioner from the sensationalist, content with mastering only the fighting aspects of the art. #1*

From this the important part is the passage “aiming to gain the ultimate use of one's body through intensive physical and mental training”. From the start Taekwon-Do is about training both physical and mental, so we must have a physical standard and it must be intensive - **right?**

Next, take a step back and look at what is “a physical standard”.

By definition of Mr Google<sup>#2</sup> a physical standard is a *Quantitative measure of requirements in a production process*. Relating this back to Taekwon-Do, what is the production process? The aim of Taekwon-Do is to be able to defend oneself from harm. The production process in this case would be the proficiency of Taekwon-Do in a self-defence situation because this would be near impossible to measure in a safe and constant way. It could be looked at as the progression through the ranks from white belt to black and beyond, with the assumption that as one increases in rank the ability to defend yourself from harm also increases.

So a physical standard for Taekwon-Do can be looked at as the Quantitative measure of requirements through the grades.

Currently in New Zealand we have a grading syllabus from White belt to 7<sup>th</sup> Dan Master, which are outlined in two syllabus books, White to Red belt and Black stripe to master (7<sup>th</sup> Dan). Each level has a set number of requirements which can be broken down into three groups: a technical standard, a fitness (body) standard and a contribution or participation standard.

- The technical standard is very important, as this is the nuts and bolts we use to build ourselves, how to block, release and, if necessary, counter attack.

- The fitness standard fills two roles. It enables one to better demonstrate their technical ability more often and gives the strength to implement the abilities learnt in the technical standard.
- Contribution or participation standard is to show involvement in the organisation and community to build on the other values of Taekwon-Do and in part to try and better the world for all.

What if there was no standard? What would this mean?

Under ITKD (ITFNZ) with the grading syllabus we have in place there is a consistence in the level of each belt from club to club, a Blue belt in one region will be should be similar to a Blue belt from another region.

If there was no standard it would come down to what the individual club instructor or examiner preferred. Levels of ability could vary drastically from club to club. Clubs with very high standards would have very capable students but would likely be low in numbers and clubs with low standards may end up with large numbers but students that are not able to defend themselves.

Should anyone be able to get a Black belt in Taekwon-Do?

Taekwon-Do is meant to be an art for the masses. Anyone who really wants to get a black belt should be able to. How would this be possible with a physical standard in place if someone is missing an arm or leg or if they have a mental disability, to gain Yellow belt let alone a Black belt?

This is when any physical standard needs to have the ability to change, not to just give out belts because of a disability but to look at the purpose of Taekwon-Do. To be able to defend oneself from harm and just because someone only has one leg does not mean that they cannot defend themselves. This is also addressed by the ITF under their by-laws.

*ITF By-Laws state,*

*7.1.1 Black Belt Membership Degrees: Special notes:*

*Candidates facing physical problems and in time to take a promotion to a higher degree could be recommended by the NA or AA to the Masters Promotion Committee in order to take a special promotion test.*<sup>#3</sup>

So in summary:

Yes a Physical standard in Taekwon-Do does really matter.

But finding the correct level for the physical standard is very important

- Having a physical standard that is too low, it would not be possible to track one's progress through the art and could lead to the watering down of the meaning of each belt. It could also lead to a false sense of security in one's ability to defend oneself. Numbers could go up but the value to the individual maybe only as good as going to the gym.
- With a physical standard that is too high, people that are able to pass grades would be the best of the best, but they would be of limited numbers and the art would not grow and could die out.
- Having a physical standard that is challenging to the majority but still flexible for those who do not meet some of the standards but have the determination to carry on is the key.

## **Bibliography**

#1 Encyclopedia of Taekwon-Do volume 1 Page 21

#2 Google search [https://www.google.co.nz/?gfe\\_rd=cr&ei=lnYfVMiYEqGN8Qe\\_x4GgCQ&gws\\_rd=ssl#q=what+is+a+physical+standard](https://www.google.co.nz/?gfe_rd=cr&ei=lnYfVMiYEqGN8Qe_x4GgCQ&gws_rd=ssl#q=what+is+a+physical+standard)

Web page <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/physical-standard.html>

#3 ITF by-laws 7.1.1 <http://www.tkd-itf.org/pagina.php?idpag=1248&web=47&lng=3>