



Overview

Based on the idea that *kata* is an integral part of Judo and that *kata* is a routine to develop one's overall Judo knowledge and skills, the IJF Kata educative project started in September 2020 in all five continents by asking experts from all over the world to share ideas for teaching the first three sets of Nage-no-kata to the broad community, and with special focus on children and youngsters.

Today, Judo is very well known worldwide and is constantly gaining popularity reaching more and more countries. Evidence of this expansion is the enormous international competition circuit and the huge number of competitions not only at world level, but also at continental, national, regional and local level. Historically, these competitions are approached as *shiai*.

Despite being one of the pillars of Judo, *kata* has experienced an ongoing decrease after World War II, with *kata* practice very often limited to *dan*-examinations. In other countries *kata* did not really arrive. Lately, however, *kata* has been gaining presence in the Judo world as a method of competition from local to international levels. This not only led to an increasing interest in countries with a long tradition in *kata*, but also triggered interest in other parts of the world where *kata* is still almost unknown.

Judo is educative and inclusive

With the IJF Kata educative project, a strategy is provided to introduce *kata* to young judoka in a progressive way to increase understanding of *kata* being an integral part of Judo education. Judo is not an activity for the elite. The power of Judo instead relies on the fact, that everyone – independent of age and gender – can practice Judo at his or her own level and condition to educate their body and mind.

This important aspect is a key approach in this work; trying to offer the maximum degree of freedom while respecting the natural development of the practitioners in order to build the most solid and stable base possible.

This work can serve as a guideline to Judo teachers to introduce *kata* as part of Judo education with examples and tools that can be put into practice during Judo classes. It also can serve as a guideline for federations to support efforts to develop training for instructors and coaches as well as grading systems.



Relevance of Kata in Judo methodology

In his New Year message for 2021, Kodokan-*kancho* Haruki Uemura explained the four pillars of studying Judo according to the founder Jigoro Kano:

“Kata” means to learn “riai,”
“Randori” to devise its application,
“Kogi” to acquire knowledge and
“Mondo” to cultivate abilities to think.

Following this four-pillar concept, *kata* must be directed to understand *riai* of each action for the purpose to improve one’s judo in general.

The proposed concept of introducing Nage-no-Kata is based on the strong belief that new approaches are required to meet the needs of both modern times and of different cultures in the various member countries of the IJF. Progress is impossible without change – but not every change is progress. Following this simple logic, theory and practice must be steadily reviewed and optimized.

Adaptable to different cultures

Teaching methods generally must be in **accordance with the personal and cultural background of the learners**. For this reason, the proposed methodology is open and flexible and can be easily adapted to different cultures.

Strategy and order of learning

Beginning at the age of 11/12 years and/or green belt, the final goal is to achieve complete knowledge (theoretical and practical) of the first three series of Nage-no-Kata (*te-waza*, *koshi-waza* and *ashi-waza*) by the age of 15-16 years old and/or brown belt. At this later stage, the learners are better prepared and can face the black belt exam with minor adjustments and with much more knowledge and practical experience than those who start *kata* practice from scratch as a brown belt.

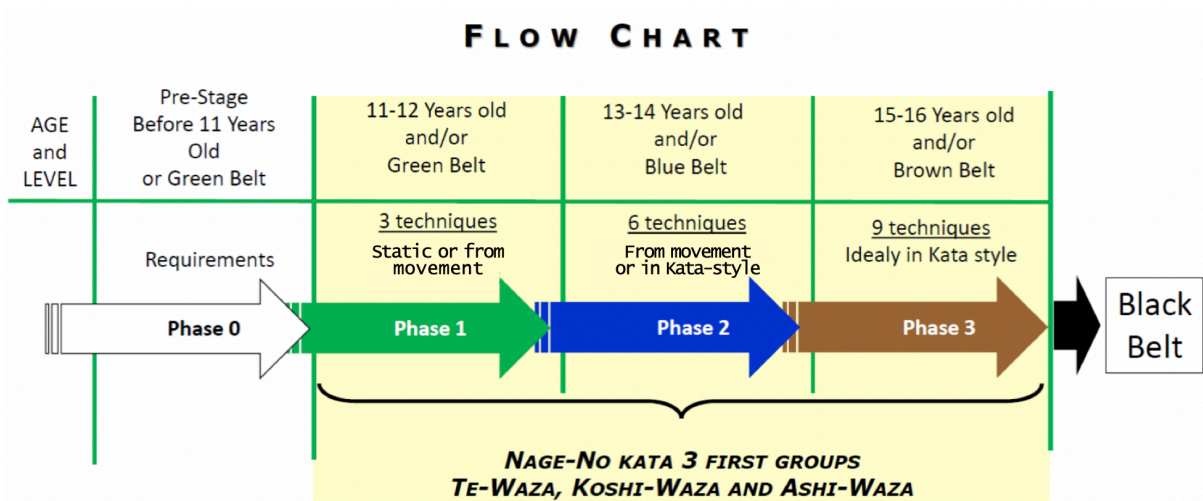
But it is the author’s strong believe that the optimum order of learning does not follow the standard order of Nage-no-Kata. Instead the order should be decided according to the conditions of the individuals and the training group. For this reason recommendations are given to support and guide teachers.

The **long-term strategy** of teaching Nage-no-Kata should start with ensuring preconditions of fundamental motor skills in a pre-phase or “phase zero”. This is followed by three phases, during which techniques from Nage-no-Kata series 1-3 are studied and



practiced. In every phase three additional techniques should be studied and practiced with the previous ones repeated and continuously improved.

The following flow chart reflects the outline of the proposed methodology. Three phases (1 to 3) have been defined by age and/or Judo level (belt colour).



FROM THE TECHNIQUE TO THE KATA

In phase 1 the learner (or the teacher) chooses three techniques among the nine available according to individual preferences.

In phase 2, the choice is six techniques among the nine available and it is likely that he/she will choose the three already learned, trained and “mastered” in phase 1 plus another three following the same criteria as in phase 1.

Finally, in Phase 3, they work on the three techniques not already learned in phase 1 or 2 to arrive at the final stage with all nine techniques learned. Now the learner can start to put them together in the order of Nage-no-Kata. Note:

- the techniques can be chosen by each learner individually not only by pairs.
- Pairs can be girl-girl, boy-boy, or girl-boy.
- All the techniques should be practiced as Tori and Uke.

This methodology tries to contribute to the natural progression of learners practicing techniques with which they are more familiar at the beginning (when they are more or less inexperienced) and the most challenging at the end, when they are better prepared.



Step-by-Step teaching ensures proper learning

The concept also suggests **progressive step-by-step learning for each technique** based on proven strategies and on scientific foundations of motor learning. The main points are:

- **consider the physical conditioning** of learners first,
- **teach *ukemi*** carefully, making it enjoyable by incorporating varied exercises including games,
- **focus on *kuzushi and tsukuri***, to ensure understanding of Judo *nage-waza*,
- **consider exemplary relevance** of each technique's key points for future transfer to other techniques, *randori* etc.

Incorporating games

The widespread approach to *kata* teaching is often rigid and formal and fails to keep learners interested during longer periods. For this reason, instructors are encouraged to incorporate games and fun drills, which should always be targeted carefully to acquire specific skills. A collection of games is provided as examples. They can be adapted and expanded (for example by using music) to different needs. **All games are related to the defined three phases** of the concept.

Expert tips

Finally some **tips for *kata* training** are provided, as well as some ideas how to transfer *kata* acquired skills to *randori* and *shiai*.