



Martial Etiquette (*Wǔ Dé* 武德) for Magic Tortoise Students

These guidelines apply to our classes; but you will find they are particularly valuable when you study with other teachers or visit other schools.

1. One who desires to become proficient in internal arts must learn first to be modest and courteous. Cultivate good humor, desire to possess self-knowledge, practice diligently, strive for balance, and thereby make steady progress.
2. Arrive on time for class. Conscientious students arrive a little early (if the space is open) and clean, clear, sweep, rake or tidy up. If class has not yet begun, students may engage in individual practice of forms or warm-ups from that class or teacher.
3. Honor the space of teaching with a bow on entering and leaving.
4. Honor the art and all who have contributed to it in the person of your teacher. Bowing to the teacher is appropriate as a greeting when the teacher enters the class space, as an acknowledgment, a “thank you” for teaching, or a courtesy on parting. With every bow, you also honor your own potential.
5. Come to class, and especially to another teacher’s class or workshop, with an open mind: an “empty teacup.” Suspend your skepticism, preconceptions, or prejudices and cultivate humility. Check your “mental baggage” at the door: you can pick it up on your way out if you still want it.
6. Turn off your cell phone and all alarm/chime functions on your watch or other devices before class. If you absolutely must remain available, you may leave your phone or pager on “vibrate” as long as it is not audible. If you leave class, bow out discreetly. If you return, wait for the teacher to bow you back in.
7. Photography of any kind, whether still or video, is not permitted in any class unless the teacher and any students who may be included give their verbal permission. Permission must also be received to post images over the internet.
8. If class starts with a circle or other set formation and you arrive late, do not barge in or cause other students to feel they must make room for you. Stand outside the circle or group and participate in the exercises; do not do your own warm-ups. The teacher will take a break between exercises and invite you in.
9. Set an example of focus and attentiveness. Even if the material seems familiar, class is a learning opportunity for you as well as for those with less experience. Questions are always welcome.
10. Continue practicing a given exercise until the teacher is ready for the class to move on. This attitude of perseverance develops devotion, and earns respect and personal attention.
11. Keep an eye on the teacher during form practice for refinements and variations. This is what class is for, even if sometimes you have to look over your shoulder.
12. Be aware of “group *qi* (氣)”: the shared energy of individuals who voluntarily harmonize with one another. If you allow yourself to match the timing and spacing of others around you, group *qi* can reinforce and augment your personal *qi* and increase your sensitivity.
13. Do not correct, teach, or converse with other students during class. If the teacher divides the class into small groups you may share personal insights and observations to help others in your group—but be sure to allow others the same opportunity!
14. It is school policy that no one may be touched without their permission. Teachers generally announce to the class at large their intention to make respectful hands-on corrections. Teachers then rely on individual students who might not wish to be touched to state that preference. Students may not physically correct another student without receiving both the teacher’s permission and the other student’s consent.
15. Teachers in this school are sensitive to the needs of individual students. However, don’t expect the teacher to read your mind: tell the teacher of anything that might interfere with your participation, such as an injury, physical limitation, or an emotional or psychological issue. If something in the class environment bothers you, confer with the teacher so it might be corrected *before* you decide to leave the class. Give your teacher the opportunity to better serve you!
16. Assume that whatever is happening at every moment is for your personal benefit. A comment or exercise introduced to the class as a whole may be especially directed toward a single student, and be exactly what

that student needs at that time. That student might be you. A single word or gesture could be worth the cost of an entire course.

17. Assist others in acquiring certain skills when asked to do so by the teacher. This is for your own development as much as for those you are helping.
18. Help your classmates, your Taiji brothers and sisters, by getting together outside of class to practice, share, and encourage one another.
19. On your own, practice whatever you remember, as much as you remember, whenever you like, as often as you can. Even if you feel it might be incorrect, practicing something is better than waiting till the next class.
20. Notify the teacher each time you cannot attend a class, any time events or injuries are affecting your Taijiquan practice, or if you plan to discontinue study.
21. Taijiquan study progresses in a spiral, along which the same material is encountered again and again at higher levels. Taking a form course once is not enough.
22. As devotion to this art deepens and desire for personal improvement increases, students are expected to request private lessons every so often—especially after learning the basic “choreography” of a form.
23. As Laoshi Paul Gallagher says in *Filling the Teacup, The Little Known Art of Chinese Etiquette*:

“In older times...cash was not the usual medium of exchange. Still, no student would even think of accepting instruction without a return of some kind. At times, if a student did have cash, a master might be given a red envelope full of money. This would be considered more appropriate than simply handing cash directly. Some...teachers, even today, like to be given a financial token of respect in a red envelope.”

Money is a symbolic form of *qi*: a medium to facilitate the exchange of vital force. In our culture, it is easier for students to pay a set price than to enter into the complexities of *guānxì* 關係 (relationships of obligation and influence in Chinese society). Nevertheless, money balances the account between teacher and student only if the student is satisfied with remaining at the most basic level of the art.

Proper and discrete handling of money is a way of showing respect for the teaching. Money, whether check or cash, should be placed in a *hóng bāo* 紅包 (red envelope). Regular envelopes are also acceptable. Checks should be written in advance—don’t make the teacher wait while you write your check. If paying in cash, be sure to mark the envelope, or insert a note, with your name and the class(es) or date of the lesson you are paying for. Cash should be flattened (no folded corners) and arranged with all bills oriented the same way. If you would like a receipt, provide one for the teacher to sign.

Payment up front, before instruction begins, is preferred—whether for single classes, a series, or a private lesson. This is simple courtesy: fill the teacher’s cup instead of waiting until the teacher fills yours. It settles the question of compensation so that both teacher and student can concentrate on the instruction. We understand cash flow problems and allow students to pay in installments for a slightly higher total fee. Please accept responsibility for keeping track of the installments you owe and the dates due. If you can only attend class sporadically you should pay the higher price for single classes.

An individual who cannot currently afford class fees may be permitted to defer payment or make other arrangements with their instructor. Barter or work-study may be acceptable forms of payment if the instructor agrees to accept what you have to offer. Even so, in most cases, the School asks these students to pay a percentage of the fee.

24. Talk to your teacher about questions, difficulties, or experiences related to your study. Consult your teacher if you are considering the use of videos to supplement your learning or if you have a “different idea” regarding a principle or form.
25. Confer with your teacher before visiting another school, studying with another teacher, or performing in a public exhibition or tournament. You will be perceived as an ambassador of this school, and we’d like to help you with the proper protocol.
26. Completion of a course or the ability to perform a form are not sufficient qualifications to teach. Our Teacher Training Program is designed to insure that students will possess the skills, knowledge, and experience to be effective teachers. Let us know if you are interested in this path.