



## VALLEY FORGE MARTIAL ARTS ♦ VAUGHN'S DOJANG

### Essay Guidelines



It's January, and you've just received the letter informing you that you're 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've 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 Dan essay. If you haven't, you had better start.

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, Master Vaughn, and ultimately, Grandmaster Shin. Therefore, it pays to spend the time to carefully prepare your essay, no matter what level of Black Belt you're being considered for.

Essays are due several weeks prior to the maintenance test, and the date appears on your notification letter. The reason for the early date is to allow the testing committee and Master Vaughn sufficient time to carefully review and edit each of the essays, return them to the candidates, and get the edits incorporated into a final draft to be submitted with the other materials to the WTSDA committee (the "envelope"). **Starting with the Fall 2005 cycle, we will be rigidly enforcing the early submission deadline for essays.** Essays will not be accepted after the date on the letter, which means you don't test that cycle. 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 Word.

- Choose your topic wisely. It should relate to your experience with Tang Soo Do and involve some level of research. A 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," won't 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. Length depends on what rank you are testing for – refer to the Gup or Dan manual.
- Once you start to put finger 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
  - In the header include:
    - Your name
    - Rank
    - Age
    - Gup/dan number
    - Word count (In Word, the word count can be found under "Properties")
    - Title of your essay
  - Use page numbering, centered, bottom.
  - Always close your essay with "Respectfully Submitted – your name"

- Don't add excess verbiage just to use up the word count. Clear succinct writing is much preferred over unnecessary adjectives, pronouns, or gratuitous phrases. If you're under the required count, think a little harder about what more you can say. If you're over the count, go back and see if you can tighten up your writing.
- In today's world of rapid communication, e-mail, IM, chats, etc. a new lexicon for abbreviation has crept into the vernacular. Don't write your essay like you're IMing your buds. Wtg lke ths jst wnt do it 4 u. Remember, this is a scholarly piece of work that Grandmaster Shin 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 would read, “I try to judge each student on his or her own effort”. This particular error is the most common one we see when editing papers.
- 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 just as well 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. We are seriously considering making this a requirement, but it only makes good sense to have somebody else review your work. Don't rely on spell check to catch all errors. Common mistakes missed by spell check: it's vs. its; their vs. they're, know vs. no, and many more.

You may submit your essay on or before the requested date electronically via an e-mail attachment to the test committee (Dr. Rosenkrans or Mr. Lipstein), in fact this would be preferred if possible. If not, submit two printed copies on or before the required date. Once received, both members of the test committee will review and make edits on your paper, then Master Vaughn. If submitted electronically, you may receive your essay with edits marked electronically using the “Highlight 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 “the envelope.”

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