

Grading Criteria

Requirements for an Approved Syllabus

Awareness, Avoidance & Escape:

Awareness and avoidance are vitally important aspects of self-protection. All physical techniques are worthless if they are divorced from threat awareness and a healthy attitude to personal safety. If an individual goes about their business in a way that exposes them to danger (i.e. a poor attitude to personal safety) and is unaware of a potentially dangerous situation as it develops (i.e. poor awareness) then events are likely to overtake them and they will have no opportunity to flee (always the first option) or make use of their physical techniques.

For a syllabus to be WCA approved it must include awareness and avoidance from the very beginning. Testing for early rank should include a test of the student's understanding of awareness (i.e. the threat pyramid, Cooper's colour codes, etc). Verbal escape skills (i.e. using the voice to facilitate escape or defuse the situation) and physical escape skills (i.e. breaking free, establishing a gap, and then fleeing) must also be taught, practised and tested.

Power Generation / The Use of Impact Equipment:

Whilst practising striking techniques in the air can have a place in martial training, "air-punching" alone will not develop effective striking skills. It is vital that students develop their ability to hit hard by hitting things hard! It is therefore vital that impact equipment is utilised at all levels of training as there is simply no other way to develop powerful striking skills. Impact equipment includes makiwara, punch-bags, focus-mitts, kick-shields, "Thai-pads", etc. It is certainly not necessary for any given group to make use of all possible items. What is necessary is that to achieve WCA approved status a syllabus a group must include what they regard as the most suitable impact equipment for both singular strikes and combinations. It would also be expected to see a progression in the use of impact equipment throughout the grades (i.e. singular static strikes for low grades, progressing to combinations on the move for higher grades).

Kata Bunkai / Applications of Forms:

Whilst the WCA does recognise that kata / forms can have indirect benefits, as an association dedicated to applied martial arts it is felt to be vital that the direct combative applications of kata / forms are always taught. Kata bunkai / applications of forms must not be approached as an "interesting extra" but instead as the main reason for kata / forms training. It is up to the individual group whether they teach applications for every single motion, teach as selection of motions of any given kata, or encourage the students to explore kata / forms for themselves. It is also up to the group whether they teach applications before, alongside or after instruction in any given form / kata. All applications taught should not be "choreographed displays", but instead be applications that have genuine relevance to the physical side of self-protection. To gain WCA approval, it must be demonstrated that kata bunkai / applications of forms are being taught in a practical way and that the student's

understanding and ability to apply kata / forms will be tested as part of their ranking requirements. Groups that do not practise kata are, of course, exempt from this requirement.

Combative Physical Conditioning

Combat is physically stressful and training and testing needs to take that into consideration. In particular, anaerobic capacity needs to be tested. Fitness is always activity specific and hence it is always better to utilise combative activity to develop and test combative fitness, as opposed to using callisthenics etc. Intense rounds of pad-work or sparring would nicely fulfil this requirement. It should be remembered that combative physical activity is more about intensity than duration. The progression through the grades should therefore be about increasing the intensity of combative activities.

Training In All Combative Methodologies (“ranges”)

Real combat is not restricted to a specific combative methodology in the way that competitive martial arts are. A WCA approved syllabus therefore needs to address all combative methodologies i.e. kicking, punching, grappling, groundwork etc. The level to which each element is addressed will depend upon the core style and the overall aims of the group. For example, for self-protection purposes, it is not necessary to have high level throwing, high level kicking, high level groundwork etc. However, a syllabus that completely ignores an area will be found wanting if someone trained to that syllabus finds themselves in a situation they have absolutely no experience of. To gain approved status a syllabus needs to cover all combative methodologies (to a lesser or greater degree) and no methodologies should be completely ignored.

Holistic Live Training

It is very important that all WCA approved syllabuses include live training. There is a world of difference between theory and practise. Any syllabus that does not include live practice will obviously not prepare students for live combat. It is very important that all live practice is conducted in a safe way and these safety requirements must be reflected in the syllabus (i.e. include a list of safety rules etc). All live practice should also be structured, and goal specific live practise is strongly encouraged. A syllabus is therefore almost certain to have a number of live drills for isolated skills (i.e. separate drills for escaping, punching, gripping, throwing, etc) as well as more holistic “all-in” drills. Live drills should progress through the grades and be appropriate for the level of the students. It is not required to include “full contact” training as such training is inappropriate for many. A WCA syllabus should develop useable skills for all types of students, not just those with the greatest natural attributes.

Scenario Training

A WCA approved syllabus will need to reflect violence as it happens. Therefore an approved syllabus needs to include drills that involve realistic role-play (as far as practicality, safety and budget allow). These types of drills will have partners playing the role of assailants and should include dialogue, intimidation, deception, surprise, etc. This can obviously be combined with live training drills and the requirements associated with awareness, avoidance & escape. Practising the protection of others is a scenario that may also be considered for inclusion (although this is not a firm requirement).

Multiple Opponents

Sporting martial arts are always one on one. Real situations, however, frequently involve more than assailant. A WCA approved syllabus with therefore need to include practise with more than one enemy. It should be acknowledged that “out fighting” multiple enemies is very difficult and therefore the emphasis should be placed on escape. For example, a drill / test may involve a person escaping from multiple partners to a predetermined “safe zone” in the hall.

Armed Opponents

Weapons are common and therefore a WCA approved syllabus must address this issue. Safety is obviously a prime concern and the use of “live weapons” in training is strongly discouraged. Live weapons effectively make the training “real” as opposed to “realistic” and therefore expose the student to potentially dangerous situations. An approved syllabus should therefore specifically denote the use of replica weapons and list all safety requirements. Whilst “disarms” maybe included, it should be acknowledged that disarming a determined enemy is very difficult. The emphasis should be on avoidance, escape, stopping the enemy “on the draw”, and, should all else fail, controlling the weapon (as best we can) and incapacitating.

Assessments of Underlying Understanding

An approved syllabus needs to establish that the student understands the combative methods and concepts that are being taught; not just physically replicating them without understanding. A syllabus therefore needs to test understanding by having the students explain what the group sees as key concepts. This testing can be in the form of verbal questions, written exams, papers on a given topic, giving a presentation, etc.

Legal Issues relating to Self-Protection

An understanding of the laws relating to self-protection for the geographic location in question should also be included in training. It is important to ensure the students are training to effectively address the realities of crime and violence whilst also ensuring they don't have unnecessary legal problems. The “it is better to be judged by 12 than carried by 6” approach wrongly excludes the possibility that we can effectively defend ourselves and not get to jail as a result: there is this “third way”. The basics of the law should be infused into training so that the student is less likely to have legal problem after the event. This can include exams, written papers, live exercises (i.e. practise of giving statements after scenario exercises etc).