

# FORMS



Most martial artist will at some time in their training study a **FORM** (Chinese term) or **KATA** (Japanese Term).

## What is a Form?

A form is a set number of self-defence techniques or basic movements that are practiced in the air predominately without a training partner. This can be likened to **shadow boxing** whereby you are practicing the basics that make up your defensive as well as your offensive techniques. The benefits of training like this are numerous, by practicing a form we learn the basic movement patterns of our system. This enables us to internalise those movements into our subconscious mind. It is only by repeating a move over and over again that we will start to internalise that move, or movements whereby we will be able to react spontaneously with it in an actual combat situation. The forms enable us to practice the same principles of technique without the fear of being hit or injured, and should be likened to shadow boxing where you spar in the air with an imaginary opponent and victoriously beat him every time.

When we practice a form it is important to **visualise** your imaginary opponent attacking you with full force and power. By imagining your opponent attacking you in this way, you will be able to place proper emphasis on the execution of your self-defence techniques.



Your breathing should be synchronised **with** the settlement of your body weight. All your movements should **flow** effortlessly from one move to the next.

There should be **no** jerky movements and worse still absolutely **no** slapping yourself. Your moves should be executed with **precision** and **accuracy**, whilst developing crisp **clean** movement executed with snap and torque. You never see a boxer slapping themselves do you? **no you don't!** So use trampolining and rebound action to a minimum.



**Remember weapons move from their point of origin.** Because we have no fear of getting injured from a training partner when we practice a form, we are able to place correct emphasis of movement where it should be in the form. Timing of your hands and feet should change according to the situation, if for example your opponent is viewed standing upright then greater emphasis may go to increasing your hand speed.

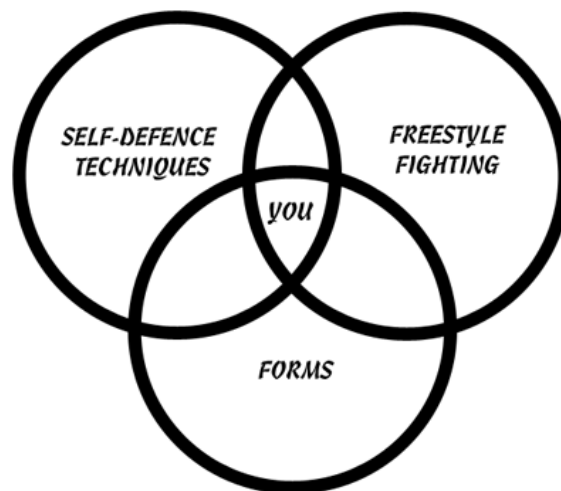
If however your opponent is viewed in a **prone position**, i.e. laying down on his side then emphasis may go to pinning or restraining them. In all of these situations you must have a **base system** to draw from, by learning forms you are able to alter the base moves to fit each situation accordingly.

### Why Practice a Form? Why Not Spar Instead?



It is important to have an understanding of why you are practicing a form. For most people the idea of spending many hours on the development of forms has no appeal, as they would much prefer to spend that time Freestyling or performing drills on heavy bags.

If however they were taught the relationship between all these areas of the arts, and that they all reinforce one another then you may be more willing to spend time developing the forms.



PLEASE REVIEW THE ABOVE DIAGRAM TO SEE THE RELATIONSHIP  
BETWEEN ALL 3 AREAS OF KENPO



**American Kenpo** teaches forms in a logical and systematic order. All forms are numbered to help identify each form. This helps student retention and understanding of the forms. The forms start with the number **one** and progress through to number **seven**. Although this may be added to in the future.

The first form to be taught is **short form one**, as the name implies this is a short form and is the first form of the system. The next form to be taught is long form one, at each number up to and including three there is a short form. This is taught first and a long form that is taught second.

The short forms are taught first, as they are the base forms from which the long form will expand from. You could say the short forms are paragraphs of motion, whereas the long forms become **dictionaries of motion** and all forms above and including long form three are encyclopedia of motion.

We should view the forms as a way in which we **index** our base movements of **American Kenpo Karate**. Remember motion without definition is useless motion. Therefore if we have a **logical** and structured way of learning motion, we will be able to **retain** the information taught to us much easier.

Remember the forms in American Kenpo are designed to be progressive. There is no point in trying to teach a beginner who is just starting to train in the art, a form far in advance of their abilities and understanding. For a student just starting to train, it is important to have an introduction into the basics of the system, which starts with short form one.

## SHORT FORM ONE



Short form one was developed to give a beginner the basic blocks and stances of Kenpo Karate. The neutral bow stance is the base stance from which an American Kenpo practitioner fights. All other stances are transitional stances and once executed they should return to the neutral bow. Even at such an introductory level the student is taught to have strong basics and to define each movement that is executed. For us to have a greater understanding of **American Kenpo** we should spend time on relevant training so we internalise the art at a much greater rate. By teaching forms and sets students and instructors can relate to moves that are repeated and emphasised in more than one area of the art. There has always been a misconception that all three area's of the art forms freestyle and techniques are separate.

They are **not**, and most definitely share identical concepts, theories and principles. The time spent training should always be productive, when practicing forms or sets, many times we will repeat a move or series of moves without realising that the move is family related or has relevance in other areas of the art. Whenever you go into a training session always go in with a goal in mind. If you want to be the best at forms, practice them and keep practicing until you are sick and tired of doing them. Then practice some more, this is the only way to improve your technique. It is no good watching some one else practice and think that you can be as good as them if you don't get up there yourself and practice.

I always admired the guys who went out on the mat and performed the forms in front of people. When you're on the mat on your own there is no place to hide. So your basics had better be good. And that is the whole point in practicing your forms. They are a key to other area's of the art. You must always see the points at which one move finishes and another begins, if you are to fulfil your true potential as a martial artist. As a student learning karate moves for the first time has little or no idea as to why they are performing these movements, an explanation as to why they are executing them is important. If a student is to have a thorough understanding as to the reasons why they perform forms then an explanation as to the content and definition of the moves the form contains, is vital for student comprehension.

As with all forms in American Kenpo, each form has a specific purpose and content theme. Short form one is designed to give the beginning student a firm foundation to fight from. It teaches the student basic blocks whilst having freedom of movement to move away from an attacking opponent. The basic stance used throughout the form is the neutral bow stance or fighting horse stance. By teaching a student a form, which contains the basics of the system, every time they train they practice the **basic fundamentals** of American Kenpo. The neutral bow stance is as relevant in self-defence techniques as it is in freestyle fighting and forms training. Short form one should be viewed as the base for embryonic self-defence techniques. The first move of the form is also the first base move of the self-defence technique Delayed sword. It is the first move of many of the family groupings of techniques whether it is a push, a grab, a punch, or a kick.

When learning short form one try to concentrate on timing your hand and foot movements so they are executed together. Synchronise your breathing so you exhale at the actual moment you make contact with the block or strike. All the principles of settlement, breathing, timing, body momentum etc should be applied when practicing forms, sets, sparring or self-defence techniques. The principles remain the same it's the actual application of **your** technique that will change. As with all motion taught in Kenpo, the forms are only a base from which to work from. They are designed to adapt and tailor to the needs of the individual. There are many practitioners of the martial arts that are physically incapable of kicking to an opponents head whilst he is standing upright. Sweep the same opponent to the floor and there will be few who could not kick to head level. The forms contain all of the movement patterns required to achieve this.

The lower forms working on solidifying and improving basics, whilst the higher forms develop key movement patterns like the heart, circle, diamond figure 8, over lapping circles etc. A key area of forms training is to develop a keen sense of balance, co-ordination, timing and correct body alignment.

There is no point in trying to control an opponents aggressive attack and disturb his balance if you are not in control of your own body. Forms training helps you to develop control of your own height, width, and depth zones, before controlling your opponents.

**So practice and practice often.**

---