

Composition of Taekwon-Do what it means for us?

Shane Rogers

Picking a topic was particularly challenging. It took a long time to decide what I should discuss. In the end I chose to take my ideas, and invoke some thought, so people to think about how they train. Why they train. And how to become more effective in all areas of a martial artist.

I think that it doesn't matter what your focus is, from breaking or sparring, or wanted technical excellence in patterns, or being able to defend oneself in real situations (all going well that never happens) you should practise all aspects of our Taekwon-Do syllabus. This is when the composition of tkd training becomes relevant. I hope to help give you (the reader) ideas to think about. To help you teach others or to have discussions with others. From my experience, thinking more about what I do, and why I do it helps me get more out of my training, and therefore; enjoyment.

In the 15 volume encyclopedia (and condensed version) created by our founder of Taekwon-Do, General Choi Hong Hi (9 November 1918 – 15 June 2002) is a section about the composition of Taekwon-Do.

“Taekwon-Do is composed of fundamental movements, patterns, dallyon, sparring and self-defence techniques that are so closely related that it is impossible to segregate one phase of instruction from another. Fundamental movements are necessary for sparring and patterns, while both patterns and sparring are indispensable for the perfection of fundamental movements.”

“In the illustration (figure 1), one can see it is difficult to distinguish the beginning of the cycle from the end. There is, in fact, like the Deity, no beginning or end. A student will find that he will have to return time and time again to the beginning fundamental movements to perfect his advanced sparring and self-defence techniques.”



Figure 1.

“Each fundamental movement, in most cases, represents an attack or defence against a particular target area or definite action of an imaginary opponent or opponents. It is necessary to learn as many fundamental movements as possible and fit them into complete proficiency so the student can meet any situation in actual combat with confidence. The pattern actually places the student in a hypothetical situation where he must avail himself to defence, counter attack, and attack motions, against several opponents. Through constant practice of these patterns, the attack and defence become a conditioned reflex movement. Power and speed must be developed to such a high degree that only one single blow is needed to stop an opponent, so the student can shift stance and block or attack another opponent. Each pattern is different from the other in order to develop the reaction against changing circumstances.”

“Once the basic patterns are mastered, the student then begins to physically apply the skill obtained from fundamental patterns and movements to sparring against actual moving opponents.”

“Collaterally with sparring, the student must begin to develop his body and toughen his attacking and blocking tools so he is able to deliver maximum damage in actual

combat. Once a student has applied himself to fundamental movements, patterns, sparring and dallyon, then the time has arrived for the student to test his coordination, speed, balance, and concentration against spontaneous attacks: ie. self-defence. The student will constantly find himself returning, however, to his fundamentals even when he has achieved the highest possible degree of self-defence techniques.“

As in military training, Taekwon-Do progression follows a certain parallel:

- 1. Fundamental Movements = Individual soldier's basic training*
- 2. Dallyon = Maintenance of equipment*
- 3. Patterns = Platoon tactics*
- 4. Sparring = Field exercises in simulated combat conditions*
- 5. Self-defence = Actual Combat*

I'm going to explore each of these components we have in the composition of Taekwon-Do, how we use these components to maximise our training, and how it will help the effectiveness of our techniques.

We should and need to learn individual techniques, practise each movement both defence and attack; perfecting them. You can take these movements and combine them into set routines, or take some key moves from one or more of our 24 patterns. Practising these techniques in sparring, pad work and forging our tools (dallyon), and ultimately using these skills in practising our self-defence.

When practising these individual techniques we should also focus on how we move forwards, backwards, how we turn and step turn. Incorporating this helps us understand how we string each movement together for combinations. Very important when looking at performing patterns, free sparring, step sparring, and self defence. Each turn, shift, and slide vary in each of our disciplines. But each help with our overall ability to move. For example, formal line work and patterns we focus on having good form, the right weight distribution, legs and arms are bent, and we to drop into our final position. This helps to strengthen our bodies and to train our muscle memory; and much more. If you look at sparring or self defense movements, these should be performed in a fluid motion, relaxed all at times, and

eventually dropping into a stance, to either counter attack or to move into a defensive position.

With that in mind, we can take these movements and have a play in semi free sparring or free sparring. This provides us a fun way to test our skills against a moving, but forgivable opponent. Providing a safe environment to practise and react to situations you and your opponent come across while sparring.

From there self defence comes into play. A more serious situation. We should take care and slow movements down while students are learning. Adding to our tool kits to handle such situations. We can provide the same movements we have in our line work and patterns, helping us understand why we practise these. For example. Often we transfer our stances from an L stance to a walking stance. Why? I think we move into an L stance to avoid and defence (knife-hand guarding block), and then move into a walking stance (with sine wave) and deliver a number of counter attacks (like a upward elbow strike). This is not only to provide power, but has a huge bearing on where our opponent is. Of course, using these sequences for self defence, we modify our more traditional stances, they are usually, shortened, legs are not straight etc, but the basic movement and feeling is still there. We should know when to tense and relax our bodies.

Training the same movements, defences, or attacks, through each of the different parts that make up the composition of Taekwon-do we will build up our understanding of what we do, increase our effectiveness, and improve the more artistic aspects of our syllabus.

1. Fundamental Movements (basic training)

Like any training whether it's a for sport, academic achievement, or learning something new. We all need to train to be able to carry out, understand, and and have fun in whatever we set out to achieve.

For example, learning to drive. We should break each movement down, like changing gears and using the clutch is one part, turning the wheels for direction is another, each in it's own right; a fundamental movement. As such, each should be focused on. To understand each movement is essential, but it's not until you put them into a sequence of movements (like a pattern) that we can make use of each single part. In this example, without combining all the

individual movements we wouldn't be able to drive. But without learning each fundamental part of learning to drive, we couldn't drive the car with total control and instinct. Learning each move individually gives us our building blocks for our overall skill set(s).

The General said to following these secrets:

1. To study the theory of power thoroughly.
2. To understand the purpose and meaning of each movement clearly.
3. To bring the movement of eyes, hands, feet and breath into a single coordinated action.
4. To choose the appropriate attacking tool for each vital spot.
5. To become familiar with the correct angle and distance for attack and defence.
6. Keep both the arms and legs bent slightly while the movement is in motion.
7. All movements must begin with a backward motion with very few exceptions.
8. To create a sine wave during the movement by utilizing the knee spring properly.

Following these tips will help when learning each movement. Each one of secrets will help in all aspects of our training, from competitions, to real life self defense situations.

I will break down the last **three** points as I think the others are more straightforward to understand.

Keep both arms and legs bent slightly while the movement is in motion.

This point looks straight forward, however, it isn't. I think this is one of the most important aspects to each movement. We must learn to move in a fluid motion, so we can defend from all directions and maintain our balance to create power. People think they are relaxed, but most aren't. Especially when practising our fundamental exercises. Power and speed doesn't come from our muscles, to truly gain power, we must relax and have acceleration (not just a constant speed) to finally tense at the moment of impact. This is not just the attacking tool, but our entire body. This contrast is so important if you want to create a truly devastating movement.

When we talk about having our arms bent we need to focus on relaxing our arms and shoulders. The only way I've found to keep the shoulders relaxed is to have your arms bent

with your elbows down below your wrists and hands. In general, this will help all movements we perform in our tkd career. Having relaxed bent arms helps relax your shoulders, relaxing your shoulders helps your posture.

All movements must begin with a backward motion with very few exceptions.

This is a continuation from the previous point. While we are moving in a relaxed manner to achieve our maximum potential, we need to create a backwards motion, except for situations like when we have been grabbed, or speed is absolutely essential.

The reason I wanted to mention this particular point, is that this principle of backwards motion is in other martial arts and sports. From kicking a ball in football, to changing direction while running around any sports field, to simply throwing a ball - all have a backwards motion. To generate a good strong controlled fundamental movement we need to breakdown the movement, and get a good understanding on how we should move.

To create a sine wave during the movement by utilizing the knee spring properly.

This is a huge complex topic. One I do not want to tackle here. So I'm going to suggest you read the condensed TaeKwon-do encyclopedia. But if you can take one thing away from this paper; is this. Do not *overdo* sine wave motion, you want to remain a natural motion while moving. Too bigger a movement slows you down; and means you lose power.

You want to compress (potential energy) the knee just enough so that you can move and use that compressed energy. Too much dipping (over bending the knee) is a waste. You want to have enough kinetic energy to have power and speed for a action with intent. Ultimately dropping your body weight into the final position.

My final point when it comes to learning and practising our fundamental movements. We cannot hope to learn how to achieve the best we can be, without gaining control over each individual action. We need to practise each attack or defense with perfection in mind. So that we can build a good solid base for what follows. If we don't we can't hope to have good solid skills when put under pressure, from sparring in competitions, to using in real self defense situations.

Remember to teach your students (and yourself) why we practise. Each movement has a purpose, we don't practise a movement to just to protect yourself, it is to gain strength, to learn to move, and have better balance i.e. training the body.

I believe it takes many years, tens of years, to truly understand and appreciate the entire system. One cannot learn to read or write without learning to create letters, words, and then sentences.

2. Dallyon (maintenance)

Dallyon isn't thought about too much in our daily training, even the most keen martial arts student forgets about this aspect. I also forget our important it is to keep our tools ready for action. Karate is well known with regards to forging their knuckles by hitting them against the 'makiwara'. The makiwara is a padded striking post used as a training tool in various styles of traditional karate.

The most common type consists of a single 2.1 to 2.4 m post driven into the ground, so that it is approximately shoulder height. The post is tapered from the bottom to a thickness of 1 cm at the top. Traditionally, a pad of rice straw is bound to the top with rope to form a striking surface. However, duct tape and foam rubber padding will work just fine, and last longer outdoors.

This can be compared to the heavy punching bag of a boxer. The General talks about 'training aids' - Page 376 of the condensed encyclopedia. There he talks about a forging post, much like the Karate 'makiwara'. So why don't we use this more? I think due to the hassle of making a post a home, and the time each day required to get those traditional 'karate' knuckles.

I think we need to do more, of course. What I like to do is, very lightly hit my hand tools (knife hand, reverse knife hand etc) against the other hand. This is enough to get your tools use to hitting something with some give, but will have enough impact to toughen these parts.

I spoke about the punching bag earlier. I think we as tkd practitioners, do not think about this as a means of dallyon. In fact, there is a section titled 'Forging Bag' - page 393 condensed

encyclopedia. Both the forging post or forging bag will help with all other aspects of our, and our students overall ability.

These tools help develop our striking by experiencing resistance to punches, kicks, and strikes. If we do not hit these forging tools correctly, for example a poorly executed punch will bounce off and our body position will be out. We will learn the importance of balance, posture, speed, breathing, and distance is important against a real target. It helps to develop our targeting and focus, which helps us generate power to penetrate the target; and with control. It also helps us experience what it is like to hit with the correct tool. Forging tools won't hurt us like board breaking. It might 'sting' but that's a good thing. Having our body get feedback and 'stressing' the body will help prepare our body for all aspects of training and real life situations.

Again these skills help us when doing fundamental movements, patterns, and sparring. If we understand how we can keep form with intent and generate effect power to a target. We (and students) will be a more overall rounded martial artist. In turn, when we understand how our body works, we will be better at patterns, feel better while performing them. If we like and understand what we are doing. We will, in turn, do it more, and more. Thus, improve our overall skill.

This will go in full circle. Practising these movements in sparring and patterns will help us do the dallyon part of the tkd circle of life. Like all good training, there should be no lasting damage. Just enough to stress the body to help gain strength and provides us a better chance of survival, if the needs arrive. If we train hard and train our body to take some impact, while outside our trainings, we can adapt and cope a whole lot better to physical impact. This could be either a fall, trip, or a self defense situation.

3. Patterns (tactics)

This aspect of our art is given a huge importance in our training. Rightly so, as it is used to measure a student's ability. It provides a means to compare our students in both competition and gradings. It is a good way to ensure that people understand our syllabus. The heights of our defence or attacks, to the different types of movement - slow, fast, continuous, connecting. Also breathing, balance, and turning... this list goes on.

Our patterns are fundamental movements, both defense and attack techniques, put into logical sequences. The idea is that you are defending yourself against one or more opponents. These attacks are coming from all directions and requires the student to move forwards, backwards, and sideways. It helps us and our students to start developing our sparring techniques, by introducing techniques and movements to their tool kit, in which, they (and you) can use in sparring. Like body shifting, sliding, body dropping. Or dodging kicks and other counters. Of course it teaches attacking too. Sometimes we need to attack first to take any possible advantage.

Patterns also help us control our breathing and gives us rhythm, this helps us move more smoothly, developing our body to move in a way that will help our sparring and self defence. Without our 24 patterns we wouldn't have a building block in which to teach. This consistency ensures we all learn the entire system, as the general intended.

Particular movements like our high kicks (fast or normal motion) requires us to be relaxed and have trained our body (and mind) to be more flexible. So patterns alone won't help us. We need to take parts of each pattern, the more difficult parts. The classic is our two high turning kicks. ITF Taekwondo Pattern 8 - Hwa-Rang. We need to practise this a lot. Train our body to be able to do this without thought. Do this in our line work; fundamental movements.

The general wrote:

A pattern can be compared to unit tactics or a word, if fundamental movement is an individual soldier's training or alphabet. Accordingly, pattern, the ledger of every movement, is a series of sparring, power tests, feats and characteristic beauty. Though sparring may merely indicate that an opponent is more or less advanced, patterns are a more critical barometer in evaluating an individual's technique.

The following points should be considered while performing patterns:

- 1. Pattern should begin and end at exactly the same spot. This will indicate the performer's accuracy.*
- 2. Correct posture and facing must be maintained at all times.*
- 3. Muscles of the body should be either tensed or relaxed at the proper critical moments in the exercise.*

4. *The exercise should be performed in a rhythmic movement with an absence of stiffness.*
5. *Movement should be accelerated or decelerated according to the instructions in this book.*
6. *Each pattern should be perfected before moving to the next.*
7. *Students should know the purpose of each movement.*
8. *Students should perform each movement with realism.*
9. *Attack and defense techniques should be equally distributed among right and left hands and feet.*

These nine points the general spoke about so important. Not to just patterns, but to the all parts of our training.

When performing our patterns we need intent. For example, fast motion punches. They need to be fast, not just speed, but to give the feeling that it is absolutely urgent to deliver these blows. Live or death. We need to teach the our students that it's more than physical actions, to understand and commit feeling depending on the sequence(s). To have this type of shift in training, I believe, will aid your sparring and self defense parts of training. During sparring we need to have moments of dynamic, fast, intent, assertive action. Either to take advantage of an opening; or to simply to dominate.

A final note on our pattern based training, based on what I see at training, this is at club level, regional trainings, and national events. We as students of our art need to concentrate on all aspects of training. I see (and I've been guilty of this in the past) our students under value patterns. They focus on other parts of training. Whether it's flying, sparring, or breaking. If we don't also take our patterns (and fundamental movements) aspects of our training more seriously, we limit our body and mind. Yes a student may win a gold medal in sparring. But if they appreciate what a pattern can teach and embrace it. They will not be the best they can be in Taekwon-Do. After all, we are a martial art. It's not just physical, it's a focussed mind that we should be training each day. For all of us, the day will come when we are too old to compete. We need to ensure that we have a good understanding of everything Taekwon-Do has to offer. So that we can continue to teach others, to continue our training, and improve how we teach our students, so that we will continue to teach this martial art for generations to come.

4. Sparring (field exercises in simulated combat)

Having discussed fundamental movements and patterns we can look at sparring. Sparring is the physical application of attack and defence techniques gain these other disciplines.

Except that it is against an actual moving opponent or opponents; under various situations. Having an actual partner to work with promotes a fighting spirit and courage, helps train your perception, and to read the opponent's style and maneuvers. An important distinction from patterns and fundamental exercises where you cannot learn from others, as it is a solo affair. However, as you learn more from the different sparring exercises, we should (and teach our students) to take the experiences and fold them into patterns / fundamental movements, and how we move in each motion. Although, it won't necessarily change how each position changes. It will most definitely change how it feels. Emotion is something we unfortunately do not teach in most classes.

Sparring is classified into pre-arranged, semi-free, free, foot technique, model and pre-arranged free sparring. Each of the classifications are under controlled environments, and as such, allows us to learn to progress to the next step 'self defence'.

'Free' sparring is a good way to test your skills, reading the opponent, timing, and the unpredictable. Unless we (this is something we learn to; all going well) can read our opponent to defend or attack successfully. This is the closest to actual combat and the next piece of the wheel; self defence. By this I mean in free sparring, we have rules, limited targets, limited techniques, in which we can use.

From there the next step is self defence. Bearing in mind, we do need to keep switching between our sparring and self defence as each complement each other. As with self defence we don't have the same rules, as in no rules in real combat. As a result we usually don't have contact at any real level due to the destructive nature of the moves. At the end of the day. We all have day jobs and can't afford to be hurt / taken out of action.

Sparring helps us test our skills with some contact against a moving opponent. Which is absolutely needed to be a well rounded martial artist; regardless of the style.

5. Self-defence (actual combat)

This part of our training the most important (my opinion), and for most the hardest. As we do not practise this aspect enough. Something that I think over the last few years has changed for the better. We have stopped trying to use arm locks and throws (not saying we shouldn't - it's fun after all). But really we should concentrate on what our art is. *A striking art*. We move and strike our opponents with the appropriate tools (open hand, knees, elbows, knifehand) to vital spots. Ears, nose, throat, groin. To do this we train our bodies using what we have learn in the other aspects of the composition of Taekwon-Do. Fundamental movements, patterns, sparring are all complimentary for self defence. Patterns help us build muscle control, relaxation, acceleration into our moves, changing directions, and general footwork. Hitting pads and other training tools helps us to understand how our body will react to impact. And our sparring helps us with timing, sudden attacks, without a scripted set of moves and at different speeds and intensities.

All of this helps us know how to how to make use of his opponent's momentum and force, while utilizing his or her dynamic and reflexive actions, against a momentarily undefended target. Certainly, these self-defense techniques can only be effective if the student takes the time to constantly train with them under realistic conditions.

The key is 'realistic' conditions. Of course we have different levels, and it is important to take it slowly to learn what to do, before we simple smack each other about. We need to break it down, practise, and then ramp it up with some pressure. Sometimes, we really need to feel uncomfortable, to be able test our skills in a controlled safe environment.

Given we are a great organisation, and have our green hand self defence hand book. We have all the resources we need in regards how we practise our defence syllabus. I didn't want to focus on what we teach but to mention how the aspect of our training is part of a bigger picture. So take our great resources and use them, adapt them for you and the students, so they work. Practise as part of the eco system that is tkd.

Putting this into practise

Now that we have discussed the different parts that make up the composition of Taekwon-Do how do we teach this in our classes? I think the best way is to break down a simple sequence of common movements. If we take a look at a front snap kick, followed by two punches (fast motion), as per Do-San. We can step through each component, each step will help build up our (and our students) tool kit, and as a result, be a more rounded tkd student, achieving their / your maximum potential.

Scenario - Front kick double punch

First up we need to break each of the movements in this sequence into individual fundamental movements. If we don't practise and master the front kick and punches that make up this sequence we can't hope to improve.

In a class environment have the students move up and down the dojang performing middle front snap kicks in a walking stance. By count, with all the technical aspects taught, for example, after the kick use full sine wave. By this I mean do not fall into the kick, but use the down up down movement to gracefully (with losing balance) move into another walking ready stance. This can be done going in both directions, forward and backwards. We can then get the student(s) to (again in both directions) perform walking stance front punch, again, moving to more advanced sequence, two punches in *fast-motion*. Without going into much detail, the two punches should be performed with urgency and be assertive. We should continue to focus on getting that combination. Once this has been drilled for understanding the movement and techniques, we can move onto practising against a pad.

Having a stationary pad to help understand how the body reacts to hitting some resistance. The idea is that students will learn how to achieve power, but why technique will help to keep balance, and in this case, following the kick with two equally strong punches hitting the same target. Again, go back to the fundamental movements, you and your students just worked on.

The next step. Using the sequence in patterns, in this case, you could use a couple. I'd keep it as simple as possible; like Do-San. The idea is that they will understand how the individual movements can be put together, how it works in the complete pattern. By hitting the pads

students will have learnt about resistance and what tools (two largest knuckles for the punches) to use, the posture, and breathing will help create a 'feeling' in which the student can perform the pattern. With realism and substance on how to perform the movement(s).

The next step is to put this sequence into sparring. First introducing some rules. Only allow students to attack with the same sequence. Front kick, followed up with two punches. This time it will be a moving target. Have students pair up and you can either both do the same techniques, or only have one at a time to do the front kick and punches. The other could do a number of things, that you as a teacher can decide. Do they just defend. Teaching the attacker how to adjust the movements. Like faking or maybe a sliding front kick, possibly a small jump into the two punches? Basically have them play, like a game.

You could have the other student only use a sidekick or any other single movement, or maybe two or three to choose from. Maybe, if a smaller group of people, talk about how people found it, what worked, what didn't?

Lastly, self defence. I'd say this is the most important part of the system. Learning to defend yourself. To take the moves you have learnt and using them to stop someone from doing something you *do not* want to happen. Without going into too much detail. This is a topic our organisation has vast information on. What I want to focus on is, how does the front kick and two punches work? Especially when required in a real life situation. Should you modify the techniques? Maybe open fists to the face is a better choice of tooling? Or maybe a couple of punches to the body is Ok?

Like anything. We need to be flexible in these movements. For example, using the forefist is effective, but without forging our two knuckles, most would simply hurt ourselves. So I'd recommend using the arc hand; or open fist. As for the kick, keep it low and target lower abdomen or groin.

When practising these movements, have it down in a semi real situation, see how the students change or react to the opponent. This is completely different to fundamental movements, or even when included in a sequence of movements. Like a pattern. Using a pad helps us understand how our body reacts to hitting something. Sparring helps us understand a moving target, which at any given moment will move, as a result we as

students need to adapt accordingly. Pushing our boundaries in self defence helps us be ready for real world possibilities.

We need to practise this continuously, this helps us get better each time, and hopefully without thought. For example, having a self defence scenario, means when doing our patterns we can have some intensity and understanding in how we can best move (step turning etc) with intent. Intent is important, and helps it become more than just *making* a movement.

Final thoughts

Like anything in life we are always learning, which of course, makes things interesting. Forcing each of us to learn, teach, adapt, and keep a very open mind.

Enjoy.