



INTERNATIONAL COMBAT KARATE-DO FEDERATION

國際格鬥空手道連盟

REFEREE TRAINING MANUAL

COMBAT KARATE-DO

Learn three things: the times / when to stop / how to score

Book 1 is common to all three Lines

Safety takes priority over the accuracy of the decision

CONTENTS

Preface How to Use This Manual

1. The Figures to Learn

2. When to Stop the Bout

3. The Judgments Most Often Got Wrong

4. Methods of Scoring

5. The Judge's Work

6. Before and After the Bout

7. Commands

8. Frequently Asked Questions

Preface — How to Use This Manual

There are only three things to learn.

- ① Times and counts (16 of them)
- ② When to stop the bout (4 cases)
- ③ Methods of scoring (3 kinds)

The Competition Rules run to 74 Articles, but **these three are what you decide during a bout**. The rest concerns tournament administration and procedure before and after the bout.

Book 1 applies to all Lines. Counts for knockdowns, accumulation of fouls, composition of the panel and conditions of entry are identical in Karate, Kickboxing and MMA. **The only thing that differs by Line is the method of scoring.**

1. The Figures to Learn

All measurement by the referee is at one-second intervals, counted aloud.

1-1 Knockdown (all Lines)

Knockdown recognised → declare "DOWN!" and move the opponent away
→ count 1・2・3・4・5・6・7・8・9・10
→ unable to stand and guard by "9" → Ippon / KO at "10"
→ stands and guards → Waza-ari to the opponent (Karate) / continue

Always count to 8. Even where the athlete rises on the count of 3, count to 8 and check their condition before "ZOKKO".

- **The clock is not stopped.** Time runs during the count.
- Where the round ends during a count, **the count continues to its end.** There is no "saved by the bell".
- **For U12 and below the bout ends on one knockdown** (no count is taken). **KB1 ends on one knockdown at any age.**
- **For U14, U16 and U18, examination by the doctor after a knockdown is mandatory.**

1-2 Non-response (standing, all Lines)

This is **time spent simply being hit**. It decides the bout even without a knockdown.

Continuation	Decision
4 s or less	no award
over 4 s	Waza-ari. The bout is not stopped
over 6 s	Ippon / TKO. Stop with "YAME"

One thing is enough to reset. Any one of the following returns the count to zero.

- Striking back (a single strike suffices)
- **Interrupting, parrying or slipping** with the arms, gloves or head
- **Moving** (forward, back, sideways, changing position, breaking distance)
- Gripping or clinching

Merely being outworked is not non-response. Nor does the count run while the opponent is not striking.

1-3 Sundome Control (Karate KK5 only)

Continuation	Decision
5 s	Waza-ari
10 s	Ippon (bout ends)

Count only while all three hold simultaneously.

1. **Controlling position** (mount, back mount, knee-on-belly, or a side position with the legs not entangled)
2. **Consecutive sundome strikes to the head** (four or more in one breath, without interruption)
3. **The opponent undefended**

Judging "undefended" — defence involves movement.

- Interrupting by **moving** the arms or elbows / bridging, shrimping, recovery of guard / gripping to attempt a reversal / countering from below / escaping, standing up or turning in from the turtle
- **A posture merely held without movement is not defence.** Arms held to the head without moving, or remaining curled without moving, is undefended in each case.

Sundome strikes against the turtle are indicated to the temple or the face. The back of the head and the crown are prohibited areas; where the angle allows nothing else, **control is not established** (the athlete must turn the opponent or change position).

1-4 Other Times

Situation	Figure	Line
Hold-down	10 s = Waza-ari / 20 s = Ippon	U12 and below
Duty to progress (standing grappling)	SUSUME at 10 s → passivity at 5 s more	Karate KK5
Duty to progress (ground)	SUSUME at 15 s → passivity at 10 s more	Karate KK5
Stalling	SUSUME at 20 s → passivity at 10 s more	MMA
Gripping	"MATE" at 10 s	Karate KK2–KK4
Ground fighting	"MATE" at 30 s × 2 (twice in the main bout, twice in the extension)	Karate KK4
Clinch	"BREAK" at 5 s	Kickboxing KB4, KB5

2. When to Stop the Bout

The safety of the athlete takes priority over the accuracy of the decision (Refereeing Regulations, Article 12).

Stop without hesitation in these four cases.

- ① An athlete continues to be struck while undefended
- ② There has been heavy impact to the head or neck
- ③ There is an abnormality in responses, gaze or movement
- ④ The tournament doctor calls for the bout to be stopped

Where a stoppage proves in the event to have been excessive, no responsibility attaches to the referee. Responsibility attaches only to harm caused by failing to stop.

A bout may be stopped in the middle of a count. Where danger is found at the confirmation, there is no need to count to 10.

3. The Judgments Most Often Got Wrong

3-1 Knockdown or Fall

This is the most important line drawn in these Rules.

Treatment	
Went down from the damage of a strike	Knockdown → count
Throw, takedown, pulling to guard, slip	Fall → do not stop. Continue as ground fighting

If in doubt, it is not a knockdown (Competition Rules, Article 17).

In Karate and MMA athletes are constantly touching the floor. **If a count began at every takedown, ground fighting could not exist.**

Where an athlete is buckled by a strike but rises at once without damage, it is not a knockdown.

3-2 Strikes on the Ground (Karate)

From whom, to whom	Strikes
Top to bottom (head)	Sundome only. Contact is a foul
Top to bottom (body, legs)	Contact permitted, but only parallel to the floor (downward strikes are a foul)
From below to a standing opponent	Contact permitted

Do not let downward strikes pass. The athlete's weight is behind them and the athlete below cannot escape.

3-4 Pushing and Hooking (varies by grade)

Grade	Pushing	Hooking
KK1 / KB1–KB5 (no gripping)	Only a momentary push with one hand made to link into an attack. Repeated pushing and pushing for defence are fouls	Prohibited
KK2–KK5 / all MMA (gripping permitted)	not restricted	not restricted

Only grades that do not permit gripping are restricted. KK1 and the whole Kickboxing Line prohibit gripping, so without the restriction pushing becomes a substitute for gripping.

Attacks from behind are prohibited at every grade — striking an opponent from their rear, giving no opportunity to defend.

3-3 Calling Passivity

Rather than forcing athletes to stand by the clock, the disadvantage falls on the athlete who does not move.

15 s, nothing happens → "SUSUME!"
10 s more, no change → declare passivity
2nd time in the round → "MATE", restart from standing

Passivity is a prohibited act. It is not a separate penalty; it **rides directly on the ladder of fouls**.

1st passivity → warning
2nd → Penalty 1
3rd → Penalty 2
4th → disqualification

※ It is **added together** with other prohibited acts (groin attacks, strikes to the back of the head and so on). Two passivities plus one groin attack is Penalty 2 at that point.

The same applies on top and below. An athlete below who holds closed guard without moving is equally subject to passivity. Where neither moves, passivity is given to both.

Passivity leads directly to defeat. In Karate, where Waza-ari are equal **the athlete with fewer fouls wins**, so an athlete who stalls loses on that account.

4. Methods of Scoring

This is the only thing that differs by Line.

4-1 Karate (KK1–KK5) — two levels, Waza-ari and Ippon

Award	When given
Ippon (bout ends)	Unable to rise within the count/referee finds continuation impossible/non-response over 6 s/submission completed/control 10 s/hold-down 20 s/ two Waza-ari /opponent disqualified
Waza-ari (two make an Ippon)	Rose after a knockdown/standing count/non-response over 4 s to 6 s/ clear and forceful throw + sundome finish /control 5 s/hold-down 10 s
Not awarded	Minor loss of balance/throw alone/guard pass/taking mount/sweep/escape/submission attempt ← all material for the flag decision. Judges must remember them

Order of decision

- ① The athlete with more Waza-ari
- ② If equal → the athlete with fewer fouls (warnings do not count)
- ③ Still no difference → extension (mandatory)
- ④ Still no difference after the extension → the flag decision must produce a winner
(a second extension is held only in the final; if still equal, the flag decision applies)

Priority in the flag decision

- ① Effective contact strikes to the head
- ② Threat of submission
- ③ Throws and takedowns
- ④ Control

4-2 Kickboxing (KB1, KB2) — first-to-points

- KB1 is first to 3 points, KB2 first to 5 points.
- Points are given for **three consecutive clean hits, a clean counter, a clean kick to the head, and an effective knee to the abdomen.**
- On time expiring, the athlete with more points; where equal, the more positive athlete.
- Headgear is presupposed. Scoring is based on **light to moderate contact.**

4-3 Kickboxing (KB3–KB5) and MMA (all Grades) — 10-point system

- At the end of each round, **10 points to the superior athlete and 9 or fewer to the other.**
- Clear damage or multiple knockdowns is **10–8**; a wholly one-sided round is **10–7**.
- **Deductions for fouls are processed within this scoring.**
- After all rounds, the higher total wins. A tie is resolved by a majority of the panel, which must produce a winner.

Scoring elements in MMA — ① damage ② takedowns ③ time in control ④ aggression

4-4 How Fouls Affect the Score

Line	Penalty 1	Penalty 2	Penalty 3
Karate (KK1–KK5)	Not scored. Where Waza-ari are equal, fewer fouls wins	as left	Disqualification
Kickboxing KB2 (first to 5)	1 point to the opponent	2 points to the opponent	Disqualification
Kickboxing KB1 (first to 3)	no point given	1 point to the opponent	Disqualification
Kickboxing KB3–KB5, MMA (10-point)	1 point deducted from that round	2 points deducted	Disqualification

KB1 alone carries lighter points because it is first to 3. Were the points the same as elsewhere, Penalty 1 and Penalty 2 would give the opponent 3 points and **the athlete would lose without having taken a single effective strike**. KB1 admits athletes from 6 years of age, and most fouls there are contacts arising because the rules have not yet been learnt in the body — gripping, the clinch, knees to the face. **At this Grade, a bout is not ended by fouls.**

Disqualification under Penalty 3 is the same as elsewhere, so the check on serious misconduct is unchanged.

In Karate, the athlete who stalls loses. Where Waza-ari are equal the athlete with fewer fouls wins, so accumulated passivity becomes the direct cause of defeat.

5. The Judge's Work



5-1 The Flag

- **Raise the flag the moment you find non-response or an undefended state, and hold it there.**
- **Measurement continues only while a majority of the panel so recognise** (Full Panel: 2 or more of the 3 Judges; Simplified Panel: 2 or more of the Referee and Judges).
- **Not raising it is equally a judgment.** If in doubt, do not raise it.

5-2 Remembering

Every advantage that is not awarded is used in the flag decision. Judges are under a duty to remember and record them during the bout (Competition Rules, Article 58).

5-3 Scoring (under the 10-point system)

- Scoring is done by **the Judges**.
 - With a Simplified Panel, **the two Judges and the Referee** score.
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6. Before and After the Bout

6-1 Checking Equipment

Line	Head	Hands	Other
Karate KK1, KK2	Head Guard (forehead, temples, back only)	Fist Guard	Chest Guard for all ; Shin Guard (women / U18 and below)
Karate KK3–KK5	Super Safe (whole face)	Fist Guard	Chest Guard (women)
Kickboxing KB1–KB4	Headgear (to cheeks and ears) / Face Guard for U12 and below	Glove	Leg Guard (leather), knee pad
Kickboxing KB5	bare-faced	Glove	as above
MMA MMA1–MMA4	Headgear / no Face Guard	MMA Glove	Shin Guard (cloth), knee pad
MMA MMA5	bare-faced	MMA Glove	as above

A Face Guard is not used in MMA because of the danger of force being applied to the neck in grappling.

Mouthguards are required in every Grade permitting hand techniques to the face (Karate KK3 and above, all Kickboxing, all MMA).

They are optional in Karate KK1 and KK2. **A Foul Cup is required for men in every Grade**; women are recommended to wear the women's type. Both are worn inside the dogi or lower garment, with no hard part exposed.

Equipment not on the approved list may be used where it is confirmed equivalent. The criterion is **the area protected** (for headgear, whether the cheeks and ears are covered). The finding is made by the tournament executive chairman or the chief referee; where in doubt, ask the doctor.

6-2 Records (mandatory)

For every bout, record **knockdowns, KOs, doctor stoppages and the site of injury** (Competition Rules, Article 32).

This is the only evidence by which the Federation can assert that the sport is safe. It cannot be created retrospectively; it must be taken from the first tournament.

7. Commands

Command	Meaning
HAJIME	begin
MATE	interrupt
ZOKKO	continue
YAME	stop
SUSUME	warning under the duty to progress (move)
DOWN	declaration of a knockdown (count begins)
BREAK	release the clinch or grip (Kickboxing)

8. Frequently Asked Questions

Q. If I give a Waza-ari at 4 seconds, do I stop the bout? No. Declare the Waza-ari, let the bout continue, and **stop it once 6 seconds is passed.**

Q. From when do I start counting against an opponent who has turtled? From the moment they turtle. Any escape, standing up or turning in within 3 seconds resets it. If they do not move past 3 seconds, the count runs on to 5 and 10. **There is no need to keep a separate count.**

Q. Do I count for an athlete put down by a throw? No. **That is a fall, not a knockdown.** Continue as ground fighting.

Q. May the athlete on top punch the body? In Karate, **contact is effective where the direction is parallel to the floor. Downward strikes are a foul.** The head is sundome only.

Q. Do the rules change between a Simplified Panel and a Full Panel? **Not in any respect.** Only the number needed for a decision changes (a majority).

Q. What if I am not confident in a judgment? Do not raise the flag. Measurement continues only while a majority so recognise. Not raising it is equally a judgment.

Combat Karate-do Referee Training Manual (ICKF Referee Training Manual), 2nd Edition Published by the International Combat Karate-do Federation (ICKF) This manual summarises the principal points of the Competition Rules and the Refereeing Regulations. The formal provisions are those of the Competition Rules. The original is in Japanese; in the event of any inconsistency, the Japanese version prevails.