

# ROLE OF GROUP BELT EXAMS

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It's been a challenging year, and it's instinctive to want to protect our kids from the stresses of the world.

The KMAA team have noticed recently that many parents have opted out of group belt exams in favour of in-class belt exams.

While we are completely supportive of this in exceptional circumstances, for example if a student has severe anxiety, we would like to **encourage students to attend group belt exams if they are able to**.

Belt exams are a not just a formality at KMAA. The level tests completed in class assess the student's ability in kicking, blocking and striking (*blue stripe*), self defence (*yellow stripe*), patterns (*red stripe*), and for more advanced students weaponry (*green stripe*) and sparring (*white stripe*).



By the time a student has received all the level testing stripes, they have actually completed all the content required for their belt in our syllabus.

But the purpose of attending a group belt exam **goes beyond re-testing** the individual components again in an exam setting, and here's why...

## **Productive pressure**

Belt exams are designed to put a little bit of pressure on (mostly for students 8 years and up). But don't read the word 'pressure' in a completely negative context here! Having a moderate level of arousal will actually **increase performance** for students.

This reminds me of doing assignments. When you have weeks before the due date, you have low levels of arousal- and performance- I remember a LOT of procrastination. The night before the due date however, the pressure is on and you push yourself to finish it in time!

What I'm referring to here is the **Yerkes-Dodson Law**. A student's peak performance occurs at moderate levels of arousal.

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We understand however, that with too much pressure, performance will be impaired due to heightened anxiety.

In a belt exam, we are aiming for that moderate balance of arousal which motivates students to kick higher, try their best, kihap louder and really put their best effort in.

Belt exams also aim to replicate the heightened arousal that may come from a real situation when self defence skills are needed. Say for example, your arm is grabbed on the street- it is very likely your body will go into panic mode.

Part of what we aim to teach at KMAA is not just the step-by-step movements of self defence, but also teaching your body **how to react productively under pressure**. How to 'get in the zone' despite feeling stress or panic.

Coping with stress is a **valuable life skill**. As much as it's natural to try and shield your child from stressors, they exist everywhere! A belt exam is a controlled, supportive environment where students can be exposed to this pressure with support in place.



## Sense of achievement

Achieving a new belt in a grading can bring with it a great sense of **achievement and pride**. It is overcoming pressure and striving to achieve something. We love watching the faces of our students who can't believe they broke that board, whose faces glow, whose jaws drop to the floor when their names are called out for their belts.

I was struck recently by asking our Instructing Team what they were most proud of during their years training at KMAA, and almost everyone said it was achieving their Black Belt!

I have also noticed that students who may not perform as well as they could at one belt exam will work harder, practice more, and do better at the next belt exam. So even poor performance at a belt exam can motivate hard work for the next one!

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## Aim of assessing

When we are assessing, we are not looking to fail students. The focus of the notes we take during sessions is to see if there are **common themes** in the group that we can improve across our classes. For example, if we notice all students' inside block doesn't cross the body enough, we can relay this to our Instructing Team to **enhance our teaching** of this technique.

## Role of level tests

Our Instructors who do in-class tests will not pass the final level test if they are not confident the student will pass the exam. We have deliberately structured our level testing this way, so that students are **given opportunities to improve** their forms, self defence or kicking before attending an exam situation. **We are not setting our students up to fail.**

## Family support

Belt exams are also a great opportunity for students to perform in front of the full attention of their family and Instructors.

We often see **students glance back to where the member of their family is sitting** to see if they saw their board break, or high kick!

It's important that family members be attentive during belt exams, cheer them on, and be ready for a thumbs up when the student looks back for recognition of their efforts!

Our Instructing Team also love to watch how students have progressed, and how they put together everything they learn in weekly training to the big event.



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## Team building

It is also a great sense of being part of a team, a community, and being there for their peers achieving a belt as part of a group. It also forges a **sense of togetherness** between peers who 'go through it together', and has formed the basis for many friendships over the years!

Finally, let me express to you, that the Assessors and Instructors at the grading table have all been in the position of the student. We have all been through gradings ourselves. We are not coming into belt exams looking to fail students, or make it hard for them. Our team is supportive and understanding, and here to **support student progress**.

We are also informed if there are students with physical limitations or learning difficulties, and we take this into consideration.



We would like to encourage students and parents to **consider participating in group belt exams**. Again, we are absolutely supportive of students with high anxiety to book into in-class belt exams if this makes them more comfortable.

However, for students who don't want to do a group belt exam because it's a little scary (*who don't have severe anxiety*), I encourage parents to support them to participate in the group belt exams.

Belt exams **build resilience**, create a **sense of achievement** and pride, teach students to **deal productively with pressure**, and deepen the bond with peers who go through the exam together as a **team**.

If you have any questions about group belt exams or would like to discuss, please contact us. I encourage parents with concerns to approach us and we can tailor the belt exam to fit the student's needs, rather than have them miss out on all the benefits of a group belt exam.

