

How to learn in Aikido and Iaido

Words in *italics* can be found in the Glossary for Beginners.

Learning in Aikido is a multi faceted process. Listening, observing, asking questions, paying attention to details and finding patterns that repeat in the big picture of training all play a part in your progress on the mat. For beginners, everything is a step by step process. After a short while, the countless small steps start melding into bigger parts of the whole and eventually become stairways to the next level of training. Learning is fun!

Listening

Listen to what the instructor is telling the class or to you individually. Try to apply the verbal instruction to your practice. Give yourself time to process the information and have it sink in to your muscle memory.

Listen to what your body is telling you as you practice. Learn how to move to keep your balance or to relieve pressure on your joints. If something hurts, let an instructor know.

Observing

Observe the demonstration by the instructor. Look at the entry of the technique and the turning of the hips. Watch for details of the movement like the turning of the wrist or the height of the hands.

Observe ways that the instructor moves into a safe place and protects the center line during a technique. Also watch how the *uke* protects the center line when moving into *nage's* space or *ma-ai*.

Observe the body language of your partner to gauge their skill level or readiness. Try to get a sense of your own body language and the messages it is giving to your partners or to people outside the dojo.

Asking Questions:

Asking questions helps those asking the question and those answering. Formulating a thoughtful explanation of a concept is a learning experience.

Ask questions of the instructor during practice time but not when the instructor is demonstrating to the class.

Asking a private question about boundaries or interactions with a partner can be done during or after class or by email.

Looking for Patterns:

Always pay attention to *ma-ai* before, during and after a technique.

Keep your hands in front of your center as *nage* and as *uke*. As *nage*, take *uke's* hand(s) away from their center to weaken their power.

First, get into a safe place. Second, take *uke's* balance. Third, throw or pin.

Breathe out when making a throw.

Breathe out when striking with *tsuki*, *yokomen uchi* or *shomen uchi*.

Use your whole body for increased power as *nage* and as *uke*.

Practice, Practice, Practice:

Practice *Shizentai* posture to make it a well balanced and powerful stance.

Practice *Kobo Kaiten* and *Zenpo Kaiten* to feel safe and in control of your falls.

Practice *Tai Sabaki* to move easily while staying grounded.

Practice pushing off your back foot as you throw your partner.

Practice staying in the moment during class.

Practice details that give you trouble as both *uke* or *nage*.

Learning in Iaido:

Learning in Iaido is the same as in Aikido except that there are no throws or pins. Postures, movement through the hips and using the whole body are very similar to those in our style of Aikido. Iaido practice consists of a warm up making a variety of cuts and then practice of kata or forms.

Iaido means the way to stay present in the moment. It is often referred to as 'moving zen'. The curtain at the front window is pulled to avoid distractions.

Learning Iaido requires good observation and listening skills along with repetitive practice to hone the detailed movements into a visual story for each form. The entire body is relied upon in practice, strengthening the core and developing fluid movement for each form.

Attention to detail is a vital aspect of practice. Use of the mirrors in the dojo can help practitioners notice and correct faults in the position of the sword, in body language and posture. Iaido is a very formal, Japanese martial art.