



Should My Child Belt Rank Test? Are They Ready?

*“The spirit of martial arts is what you carry
in your head and in your heart.
Not something you wear on your waist.”*

Important to Understand: It is a common misconception among most non martial art practitioners that a black belt means expertise or mastery. If you have just earned your black belt and are actually deserving of one, you have probably come to the realization of not how much you know, but how little you know. To our way of thinking, it means a fair understanding of and the ability to execute the basics. Mastery of the art takes a lifetime (and sometimes, that is not long enough). Earning or worthiness of a belt rank is set by each individual martial art studio and/or its affiliate or sanction organization, and as such, requisites vary widely. Some studios are guilty of being what we call 'Belt Factories' which are based on the almighty dollar, and as such, move their students through the belt ranks swiftly, whether the rank was truly earned or not. This is not a philosophy that we at FMA subscribe to. In our minds, a student must show proficiency and aptitude at each level of their training and prove their worthiness by having shown that they have truly earned their belt rank.

Accountability: At FMA, we hold ourselves (Management, Instructors & Leadership Students) highly accountable for the instruction we impart to our students. Additionally, we hold each of our students accountable for their willingness to learn as well as to practice the tenets that we teach and the physical training we provide them. In martial arts, it is not so much physical aptitude, or ability, as much as it is the practice in its entirety, i.e., showing self-control, a positive attitude, respect and courtesy to others, integrity, perseverance and an indomitable spirit, as well as proficiency in the training they receive. At FMA, our rank promotion is based on a sliding scale of accountability from our students as it relates to the students age and where they fall in the ranking system. Meaning, we have differing expectations from a 3 and half year old white belt as we do of a 10 year old green belt. In the beginning with regard to students new to the practice, i.e., white belts, we are focused more on the tenets of our practice more so than their physical proficiency with regard to fully memorizing their forms or showing a high level of technical aptitude. As our students move up the ranks however, expectations increase and as such, accountability scales accordingly with regard to form memorization and technical aptitude. For example, by the time a student reaches the rank of Green belt, there is a greater emphasis on memorization of their form, etc..

Minimum Requirements: At FMA, our training structure and rank promotion schedule requires a minimum number of hours of training over a minimum number of weeks between each belt rank promotion testing opportunity. The FMA Color Belt ranking system takes a minimum of 4 years of training at half belt rank increments to achieve the rank of 1st Degree Black Belt. For each degree of black belt thereafter, the student is required to hold said rank for a number of years equal to the number of the degree. For example, a 1st degree black belt must hold that rank for 1 year before qualifying to test for 2nd degree black belt. 2nd degree black belts must hold their rank for 2 years before qualifying to test for 3rd degree, and so on through all 9 degrees of black belt. The reason for this requirement is to provide ample time to practice and master all of the additional training required to learn for each degree of black belt training requirements. In addition, there are other requirements of black belts such as being a member of our leadership program, and serving other students in the studio as an Instructor and Mentor.

What Does It All Mean? Here at FMA, you will see students of all color ranks practicing self-control, discipline, respect, humility, perseverance and varying levels of physical ability. A black belt does not mean that the student can fully defend themselves against anyone else of any age or size, but that they have learned a martial art. And remember that a 12 year old black belt is just that; a 12 year old. A black belt means that you have learned the basics and are now ready to apply those basics to advanced learning. Think of a black belt as graduating from high school- you have learned a lot, but now comes college, graduate school and then, real-world application.

Reward & Recognition: One of the most important aspects of martial arts is the reward and recognition process. i.e., Belt Ranking. We are often asked, especially by new martial art parents whether we feel their child should test for their first, or next belt rank. Are they ready? First, you should know that we do not present opportunity to fail. What we mean by this; is that should we feel that a student is not ready to test, or if they did test they would fail, we will discuss this with you, the parent. We will not recommend a student to test if we feel they are not ready. Generally speaking however, so long as the student meets the minimum class attendance requirement and has shown good will toward learning our principals and practices and has maintained a positive attitude and followed instruction well, then we most certainly will recommend that they test for their next belt rank. It is important that the student learns early on that there is recognition and reward for their hard work and efforts, and as such, they will become more motivated to try even harder going forward. Again, as they move up through the ranks, more emphasis is placed on memorization and technique, but with the early belt ranks, it is more about positive reinforcement and the lesson of effort = reward.

Summary: To the question; ***"Should my child test for their next belt rank?"*** The answer is usually, YES!

