

Guide for Applicants

How can we help you to become an instructor member?

If you are intending to apply to become a registered instructor with the Tai Chi and Qigong Union for Great Britain, or to upgrade to a higher level of instructor membership, we want to help you in every way we can.

We are very much aware that it takes years of study and practice to become proficient in a Chinese Internal Art such as Tai Chi, Xing Yi, Ba Gua, Lui He Ba Fa or Qigong and we are delighted that you have reached a stage where you feel ready to pass on your hard-earned skills to others.

At the same time, we need to ensure that the quality of these arts is maintained. So please read this short guide carefully. If possible, print it off as a checklist that you can work through in order to give you the best possible chance of having your application accepted.

What happens when you apply for instructor membership of the Union?

Your application form, references, and video evidence of your skills are received by the membership secretary, who passes them on to the Technical Panel.

The Panel will then assess your evidence to see if it is sufficient to show that you are able to demonstrate your skills and movements in a safe manner and at an appropriate level.

It is always great to welcome a new member into the Union and we hate to disappoint anyone by finding ourselves unable to approve their application, whether that's due to insufficient evidence having been provided or to an inappropriate level of skill having been evidenced, so here are some tips to ensure that you have the best possible chance of having your application approved.

Please note that the following advice relates to Tai Chi and related disciplines. There may be separate requirements for Qigong.

How to prepare for your Technical Panel assessment

1. Make sure that you have been training with an experienced and knowledgeable instructor who is able to teach you an authentic style of your chosen discipline to an appropriate standard. Be aware of your lineage, if possible.
2. Make sure you understand the principles of your art (see below).

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3. Make sure that your techniques and postures are safe and unlikely to cause injury to yourself or your students (for example by causing damage to the joints due to incorrect foot positioning).
4. If your instructor has given you permission to teach, or will give you a reference, or has issued a certificate for your achievements, these may be useful in support of your application.
5. Record one or more videos of yourself doing the forms and skills you are wishing to teach.
6. Check your own performance according to the principles and grading criteria listed below. If in doubt, get someone else to look at your video(s) with you and give you honest feedback.
7. Make sure you are not doing anything on the list of things to avoid. If necessary, you are strongly advised to correct any errors and re-record your video(s).
8. Make sure your video(s) is/are representative of the main styles, forms or arts that you are teaching, if possible. (For example, if you are claiming to be able to teach the Beijing 24 step Taiji form and Pushing Hands, please make sure you do the sequence all the way through and find a partner to push hands with who doesn't mind being in your video). If your form is very long (say, above 40 to 50 movements) you may only submit half of it but please ensure that the section shown in your video includes the movements: ward-off, roll-back, press and push (peng, lu, ji, an – or grasp the bird's tail).
9. Then submit your application form, references if you have them, and video(s) to the Membership Secretary.

What's involved in a Technical Panel assessment?

Your video footage will be passed to all members of the Technical Panel, who will each assess what you are doing and make notes on what they have seen.

They will then meet, in person or online, to discuss the level of skills you have demonstrated.

You will then receive feedback from the Membership Secretary on the decision as to whether you are:

- Accepted as an instructor member of the Union at an appropriate grade, or
- Not yet accepted, due to insufficient evidence having been submitted or your skills requiring further improvement to reach a standard suitable for teaching your chosen discipline to others.

What are we looking for?

To be admitted as an instructor, or to be upgraded to a higher level if you are already an instructor member, your video evidence must show that you understand and are able to

demonstrate, through your own movements, the main principles underlying your chosen discipline.

The Tai Chi Principles

While the various styles of Tai Chi (Taijiquan) differ from each other in some ways, all of them obey a set of underlying principles, as described in the Tai Chi Classics, such as *The Treatises of Zhang San Feng, Wu Yu Xiang and Wang Tsung Yue* and the works of *Chen Xin* and *Chang Naizhou* and these principles underlie other internal martial arts such as Xing Yi, Ba Gua and Lui He Ba Fa, though there are additional classics relating more specifically to these systems.

If you read the particular classics relating to your own style, you will come across these principles again and again, together with a few style-specific variations that do not conflict with them but simply allow their expression in various ways in order to achieve different purposes. For example, some styles may emphasise different types of breathing, chi flow and use of the lower dantien, particularly in relation to the expression of internal power in a martial setting. Others may vary in their interpretations of the use of the waist, as described in the classics (e.g. *"Internal power should be likened to the spinning of a wheel. The waist turns like the axle of a wheel in motion"*, Wu Yu Xiang 1812-1880).

Some principles relate to posture and moving sequences (forms) while others relate to combat and the martial skills developed while practicing your art. If you intend to practice and teach for health and relaxation only, you don't need to demonstrate the martial skills, but it is wise to know that they exist, as this knowledge can help to enable you to perform the movements correctly and to derive the greatest health and other benefits from them. While it is understood that many people practice Tai Chi as an exercise system beneficial to their health and well-being, and gain considerable benefits from this, and many instructors teach the art for health and relaxation only and have no interest in its use for self-protection, this should not detract from its identity as a martial art.

In your forms (sequences), the main principles are:

1. **Alignment of the Crown Point.** Depending on the style you practice, your spine should be upright or slightly sloping forwards. In either case, your back should be straight, your tailbone dropped and your head in line with your back. In an upright stance, your gaze should be level so that the very top of your head feels as if it is rising upwards, while the rest of your body relaxes downwards, supported by your upright spine, like a heavy coat on a clothes hanger, allowing your knees to flex, your tailbone to drop towards the floor and your back to straighten. This upright, balanced, relaxed posture gives rise to a quality called 'song' (pronounced 'sung'). If you then slope your body forwards, as in styles such as Wu and Wu Dang and some interpretations of large frame Yang Style, your

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head and spine should retain that alignment so that your back does not arch and your bottom does not stick out behind you.

2. **Sinking and rooting or grounding.** If your posture is correct (as in 1 above) it will allow your body to relax and your weight to sink down into your legs so that you become stable and balanced, even if you are in a back stance or performing a kick.
3. **Stability and structure.** In forward stances, the front knee should not go beyond the toes of that foot. Such over-bending puts undue strain on the knee and back and can lead to instability and possibly injury. The posture should always remain stable and powerful, yet without any tension, stiffness or robotic movements. Feet should be carefully placed in order to ensure that the hip, knee and foot are correctly aligned to maintain structural integrity. Stability does not imply static postures. Movements can be lithe, agile, fluid and continuous, yet still have an underlying stability and structure.
4. **Relaxation and Softness.** While the body remains so relaxed that some people may refer to it as almost "boneless", that does not mean that wiggling the hips and writhing around like a rag doll is an acceptable interpretation of the principles. An awareness of structure is as important as relaxed softness and sensitivity.
5. **Shoulders and Elbows** should be relaxed and dropped at all times. Even when you are performing movements where a hand or arm lifts above shoulder level, such as White Crane Spreads Wings or a high elbow strike, there should still be a corresponding downwards pressure on the shoulders and upper arms, as if you are standing at the bottom of a lake under the weight of all that water, without any collapsing or bending of the upright spine. Paradoxically, this downwards pressure gives power to your movements in the same way that pressing one end of a seesaw causes the other end to rise. This is a fundamental quality of ward off (peng) and can be seen in the opening movements of any Tai Chi sequence performed well. If the shoulders rise before the arms that is a good indication that the practitioner does not have the ward off energy (peng jing) and internal connectedness that is an essential quality of Tai Chi and other internal arts.
6. **Whole-body connectedness.** In any Tai Chi sequence, the movements are smooth, rhythmic and flowing. Known as "the string of pearls effect", this quality refers to the connectedness between all parts of the body as it moves. This is not as complicated as it sounds. You don't have to remember to move this bit and that bit in a particular order, just be aware of the "string" ("energy" or "chi") flowing smoothly through your body and limbs, and you will find that the "pearls" move effortlessly and naturally. This is what is meant by the energy arising from the dantien (lower abdomen), being directed by the waist and expressed through the arms, hands and fingers. However, practitioners of different styles may have different understanding of the meaning of the word "waist", which can have various interpretations when translated from the Chinese word "yao".
7. **Breathing** should be relaxed, smooth and inaudible (no breathlessness or panting) except when issuing power (Fajin), when various martial sounds may be uttered and the mouth may open to release pressure that might otherwise cause

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damage to the nasal cavities or throat. Abdominal breathing may be suitable when practicing for relaxation only, but when practicing the arts martially, dantien or "Taoist" breathing may be used. While this is often referred to as "reverse breathing", it is not the direct opposite of abdominal breathing, and it requires expert tuition.

8. **Intent and Focus.** Your forms may convey internal awareness (of breath and chi flow, for example), peripheral awareness and martial intent for each movement, as appropriate. The mind should not be unduly distracted by external influences.

Common errors to avoid:

1. Leaning in various directions (other than the forward tilted postures appropriate to some styles such as Wu Style, Wu Dang Style or some interpretations of large frame Yang Style and some of the animal postures of Xing Yi Quan). Common sources of error include stooping forwards and looking down at the feet or trying to tuck the tailbone under excessively, resulting in leaning backwards.
2. Lifting the chin too high or dropping it too low. The gaze should be level, allowing the body to remain "song" and maintain good postural alignment. If you are told that you are looking downwards or stooping, don't be tempted to leave your back where it is and lift your head; instead, just sit down into your stances a bit more so that your tail bone drops, your spine lengthens and straightens, and your head can then align itself naturally without sticking your neck out.
3. Front knee projecting in front of the toes in a forward stance. In a forward stance, you should still be able to see your toes as you look down past your knee.
4. Arching your back and sticking your bottom out behind you, which can be corrected by relaxing down further into your posture and allowing your tailbone to drop so that your spine naturally finds its correct alignment.
5. Lifting your shoulders and/or elbows unduly.
6. Performing the movements in a stiff, jerky or robotic manner. Movements should be relaxed, smooth and continuous, unless you are expressing fajin or the explosive movements of Xing Yi, for example, though even these should still be smooth, controlled, relaxed and powerful rather than stiff or jerky.
7. Performing the movements too loosely without any structure or stability.
8. Moving the arms independently of the body instead of allowing them to follow the continuous flow from the dantien and waist.
9. Locking your knees out inappropriately rather than sinking and rooting. The back knee should normally be flexed so that you can remain upright and use your dantien, rather than tilting the body forwards, unless this is your intention due to the particular style you are practicing.
10. Over-reaching, eg by locking the arms out straight in a push. This may also give rise to the errors of leaning forwards and arching the back inappropriately.

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11. Falling into your steps. Locking out the knees in an upright stance before attempting to step forwards can result in “falling into your steps”, as if you are launching yourself off a cliff, while sinking into the back leg allows the front leg to reach out comfortably and step in a controlled and well-balanced manner.
12. Too narrow stances, as if you are walking on a tightrope, resulting in instability or loss of balance and an inability to sink, open the kwa or use the waist and/or dantien effectively.
13. Awkward foot positions that put strain on the knees or other joints e.g. “chicken leg”, in which the front foot in a forward stance is turned inwards, leading to the knee collapsing inwards in a zig-zag manner. If your style calls for the slight turning in of the front foot to about 10 to 15 degrees, the body will normally align itself obliquely so that the stability of the knee is maintained. There may also be conscious attention paid to the positioning of the thigh (opening of the “kwa” or hip joint) so that the knee does not collapse inwards. Another error involves turning the foot outwards in a forward stance instead of remaining in line with the knee, so that full body weight is then transferred into a twisted knee and ankle. Where the foot does turn out before stepping forwards, injury can be avoided by turning the body in that direction first so that the foot can naturally align itself with your nose and breastbone before you transfer any weight into that leg.
14. Throwing the hips from side to side, as in Salsa dancing. Another common cause of a hip out of alignment is to turn the body ninety degrees to right or left by turning only the foot out without turning the body first. If the body is allowed to turn first, the foot can then naturally align itself as you move so that you can safely transfer your weight into that leg without destabilising the hip or other joints.

Many of these errors could cause injury to joints, yours and those of your students, particularly if you may be teaching people in older age groups.

You are strongly advised to look carefully at your video(s) of yourself doing your form(s) to ensure that you are not making any of these mistakes, before submitting any video for assessment. To avoid disappointment, do be sure to correct any errors and re-film your sequence(s) before sending in any material to the Technical Panel or teaching your form to others. Remember to demonstrate all the movements of the main forms you intend to teach, or about half of a very long form. We need to see enough to know that you can do it properly all the way through.

We wish you luck with your endeavours and hope to hear from you soon.

Kind regards,

The Technical Panel