



Standards Guide for applicants

for Instructor Membership of

The Tai Chi Union

for Great Britain C.I.C.

Tai Chi Internal Arts is a trading name for The Tai Chi Union for Great Britain C.I.C.

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About the Tai Chi Union

The Tai Chi Union for Great Britain is a not-for-profit Community Interest Company (CIC), founded more than 30 years ago. It is owned and run by its members, with most administrative work carried out by unpaid volunteers on a part-time basis.

The Union supports everyone with an interest in the Chinese Internal Arts, including Tai Chi Chuan, Baguazhang, Xingyiquan and Qigong. Membership is open to all styles and all levels of experience, from complete beginners to highly experienced instructors. Ordinary Membership is available for practitioners who are not teaching, including those who have retired from instruction, while Instructor Membership provides recognised professional credibility.

The Union is committed to promoting high standards in teaching, helping to ensure that people across the UK can benefit safely from the health and wellbeing associated with Tai Chi and the Internal Arts. As part of its public benefit role, the Union also provides free educational resources, including booklets on Tai Chi Chuan and Qigong, along with recommended reading written by members.

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Introduction

Becoming an Instructor Member of the Tai Chi Union for Great Britain recognises that you have achieved a good standard of practice and teaching in the Chinese Internal Arts. The Union welcomes practitioners from all recognised Tai Chi Internal Arts and styles, so assessments focus on demonstrating core principles rather than style-specific techniques. As different traditions interpret the classical teachings in different ways, applicants are assessed on sound practice rather than conformity to one style.

To be eligible for Instructor Membership, applicants must have practised for a minimum of five years and intend to teach at least one of the following disciplines: Tai Chi Chuan, Baguazhang, Xingyiquan or Qigong.

Preparing for your Technical Panel assessment

Below is some guidance on the best way to prepare for your assessment. If you have any questions, please contact us at enquiries@taichiunion.com.

Train for at least 5 consecutive years before applying

Make sure that you have been training for at least 5 consecutive years with experienced and knowledgeable instructors who are able to teach you an authentic style of your chosen discipline to an appropriate standard. Be aware of your lineage where possible. You must apply to teach one the four main Tai Chi Internal Arts, Tai Chi Chuan, Baguazhang, Xingyiquan or Qigong.

Understand the principles of your art

We accept all recognised Tai Chi Internal Arts and styles, so our assessment process focuses on principles that need to be demonstrated rather than styles specifics and we recognise that different styles interpret the classics differently.

For Tai Chi Chuan and Qigong we have given the specific points the Panel are looking for.

Make sure you can demonstrate your understanding of them in your documentation and video evidence. We can only assess you on what we see in your videos and read in your written evidence.

Ensure techniques and postures are safe

Make sure your techniques and postures are safe and unlikely to cause injury to yourself or your students, e.g. by causing damage to joints due to incorrect foot positioning, posture or load bearing.

What must you include in your application?

To be admitted to the Union as an Instructor member, you need to send us evidence of your practice AND teaching ability.

More details are included in our [Process Guide on our website](#)

If you have any questions about your application, please contact us at enquiries@taichiunion.com.

Checklist

No	Submission	Comments
Written Information - REQUIRED		
1.	Training history Included in the Application Form	New member form Existing member – email us for a form
2.	Explain your teaching approach	Teaching approach template with hints and tips Teaching approach example
3.	Lesson Plan	Lesson plan template with hints and tips Lesson plan example
4.	Review your teaching video demonstration	Teaching video review template with hints and tips Teaching video review example
5.	Risk Assessment <i>Send your own OR send relevant course certificate dated in last 12 months (*)</i>	Risk assessment template - UK Health & Safety Exec. Risk assessment example – Tai Chi Lesson
Written Information – optional		
6.	Reference from your Instructor	See process guide for further information
7.	Other documentation	See process guide for further information
Video demonstration - REQUIRED		
8.	Practice demonstration	See process guide for further information
9.	Teaching demonstration	See process guide for further information

(*) Union members can access an online Risk Assessment Awareness Course assured by Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA). We accept certificates from this course or similar.

Access to online Professional Skills courses at a discounted rate is one of the membership benefits

Principles to demonstrate in your application

Below we have set our expectations for the principle we expect you to know to be a registered Instructor Member with the Union. You can demonstrate this in your videos and your written information.

Tai Chi Chuan

All the styles of Tai Chi Chuan 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. 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 classics relating to your own style, you will come across these principles together with a few style-specific variations that allow their expression in various ways to achieve different purposes. For example, some styles may emphasise different types of breathing, 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.

In your forms (sequences), the principles you need to demonstrate are:

1. Alignment of the crown to the spine.

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 Wudang and some interpretations of large frame Yang Style, your 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. Relaxed shoulders and elbows

These 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 rising, 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

There should be 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 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, whether hand forms or weapons forms, should convey internal awareness (of breath and chi flow, for example), peripheral awareness, precision and martial intent for each movement, as appropriate. The mind should not be unduly distracted by external influences.

Common errors to avoid

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.

1. Leaning in various directions

This should be avoided 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

This 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

Arms should follow the continuous flow with the rest of the body.

9. Locking your knees out inappropriately rather than sinking and rooting.

In forward stances, the back knee should normally be flexed so that you can remain upright, rather than tilting the body forwards, unless this is your intention due to the particular style you are practicing. In back stances, the front knee should remain a little flexed, allowing springy resilience to be maintained.

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.

11. Falling into your steps. Locking out the knees in an upright stance

Doing these things before attempting to step forwards or diagonally can result in “falling into your steps”, as if you are launching yourself off a cliff. This can be corrected by sinking the weight into a flexed supporting leg, allowing 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

This can result in instability or loss of balance and an inability to sink.

13. Awkward foot positions that put strain on the knees or other joints

For example, “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 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 waist and 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.

This is another common cause of a hip out of alignment is to attempt to turn the body ninety degrees to right or left by turning only the foot out without turning the body first. If the waist 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.

Qigong Guide

Most Qigong in the UK is practised for health and wellbeing, but many systems and methodologies of Qigong exist.

The term Qigong has only been in use since the 1950s, but we use it here to include other Chinese terms that historically relate to self-development by working with qi, such as neigong and daoyin.

Styles and systems of Qigong may differ from each other in many ways, but they also have things in common, and all have a Lineage that you should know something about, from your own teacher. We invite you to supply general information related to the Qigong you are planning to teach and its general or style-specific principles, if they differ from those listed in our guidelines.

Actions that may be called the 'Three Regulations,' are what differentiate Qigong from other types of exercise. These are:

- regulating the body
- regulating the mind and
- regulating the breath.

Principles you need to demonstrate

Throughout your written and video evidence, make sure you demonstrate a good understanding of the energy system of the body for your chosen form/s. This would include an appropriate level of knowledge about qi flows in the body and positions of relevant acupoints.

In the videos for your practice and teaching the Panel will be looking for:

- Correct posture and alignment before movement commences.
- Correct posture and alignment and during the specific chosen form/s, with particular attention to alignment and connection of head, from crown through neck and torso; upper limbs (shoulder blades, shoulders, elbows, hands); lower limbs (feet, ankles, knees, hips).
- Level of whole-body connectivity and openness - torso connection to the components above. Is the whole body moving harmoniously, or working body components and sections well in order to loosen and engage better connectivity and qi flow
- A well-grounded connection with the earth, with clear and robust use of legs throughout.
- Connection to heaven, earth and the environment, as evidenced in choreography and intent.
- Relaxed body with no inappropriate tension visible (unless part of a deliberate routine).
- Stable and balanced movements.
- Appropriate regulation of breath, and sounds (if applicable), where discernible
- Evidence of qi movement, discernible within the performance of Qigong set/s
- Correct sequence, choreography and transitions within forms.
- Steady presence, focus and intent.
- Qualities of yin-yang interplay.
- Smoothness and fluidity.
- A vibrant aliveness.

Common errors to avoid

This is trickier for Qigong than Tai Chi Chuan and internal martial arts because of the variety of styles and exercises, so there may be exceptions, e.g., for seated or laying down Qigong.

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

- Lifting the chin too high or dropping it too low. The neck should have an openness and not kink at the occiput.
- Gaze should be appropriately angled for each movement, not consistently looking at the floor or upwards.
- Looking from side to side and twisting your neck inappropriately to appear to get more waist or hip turn.
- Weighted knee or knees projecting in front of the toes, you should still be able to see your toes as you look down past your knee.
- 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.
- Lifting your shoulders and/or elbows unduly. Shoulder blades should drop to raise arms.
- Performing the movements in a stiff, jerky or robotic manner. Movements should be relaxed, smooth and continuous, unless you are expressing sudden releasing or explosive movements, for example, though even these should still be smooth, controlled, relaxed and powerful.
- Performing the movements too loosely without any structure or stability.
- Performing the movements in far too small a range of movement
- Moving the arms independently of the body (unless in loosening/warm-up Qigong) instead of allowing them to follow the continuous flow from the dantien and waist.
- Locking your knees out inappropriately rather than sinking and rooting.
- No evidence of qi movement, practitioner is just doing physical exercises.
- Over-reaching, e.g., by locking the arms out straight.
- Falling into your movement because the weight was not fully in one leg.
- Too narrow stances, as if you are walking on a tightrope, resulting in instability or loss of balance and an inability to sink.
- Awkward foot positions that put strain on the knees or other joints, for example leading to the knee/s collapsing inwards or bowing outwards. 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.

Baguazhang Guide

We have very few applications for this internal art and have yet to develop our guidance. If you would like to include this in your assessment, please get in touch at enquiries@taichiunion.com

Xingyiquan Guide

We have very few applications for this internal art and have yet to develop our guidance. If you would like to include this in your assessment, please get in touch at enquiries@taichiunion.com