A Proposed Ukemi Curriculum for the Self Defense Class

I. Purpose of the Document

This is a general proposal for a formal revision of ukemi for the Self Defense Class. A rigorous, well-structured ukemi curriculum is both necessary and desirable in the system for a number of reasons:

1. Poor ukemi is dangerous. Ukemi is first and foremost a martial art designed for "falling away from harm." Many of our joint throws cannot be safely executed at realistic speeds without ukemi. At upper belt levels, many other throws are high enough and fast enough that improper ukemi is very likely to result in injury. Lastly, any incorporation of freestyle practice into the class must be built upon good ukemi skills. Students need formal ukemi skills to rise above needing to know exactly which throw is coming to safely execute a fall.

2. Good ukemi is a superlative teaching tool. It gives tori a visceral sense of how proper technique should look and feel even when she is still learning to execute the technique properly. A student gains this insight both from throwing an uke who uses proper ukemi, and by using proper ukemi herself.

3. Poor ukemi is ultimately counter-productive to good technique. Once tori gets up to speed, effective practice requires that uke be capable of receiving technique full bore, without tori hesitating or slackening-off out of concern for uke's safety.

4. Ukemi is also a good confidence builder for physical skills. It promotes knowledge of body movement and position, and seems to reduce the "nervousness" that beginning martial arts students often exhibit.

This proposal consists of two major segments: an analysis of the current requirements and teaching method, and the proposal for new requirements and a new teaching curriculum. The general objectives are:

1. Develop a system based primarily on adding safety to the existing structure.

2. Minimize changes to the existing curriculum, particularly with regard to additional time needed for instruction.

3. Provide as much of a rigorous, written pedagogy as possible, so that instruction does not rely on the physical continuity of student-to-student teaching.
4. Provide formal guidelines for testing.

The general caveat for the curriculum is that a student should be tested for the ability to execute proper ukemi for a given technique at the same time that the technique itself is tested. For example, upon getting his green belt, a student should be competent in all the ukemi needed for green belt techniques.

**Philosophy of Ukemi**

The following anecdote was recounted by Doran Sensei (6th Dan, Aikido). It was told to him in turn by his instructor, Saitome Sensei (9th Dan, Aikido), who was O'Sensei's senior student.

*Saitome's technique was good enough that he could completely resist a junior student's attempts to get a wrist lock on him. One day, upon noticing Saitome's behavior, O'Sensei asked Saitome to resist him. When the wrist lock failed to move Saitome, O'Sensei leaned forward and bit into Saitome's hand, causing the student to cry out in pain.*

*O'Sensei proceeded to explain that Saitome's approach was meaningless in the context of martial arts. If a technique fails to work, tori must use a different technique. Uke's responsibility is to resist enough to assist tori in understanding the technique, not so much that the technique itself fails. Tori is not attempting to apply the technique irrespective of circumstance or uke's ability to resist. No technique can be made to work in every circumstance.*

With this anecdote in mind, the following is a suggested context for the revision of the ukemi curriculum using safety as the paramount goal. It takes the form of several paradigmatic concepts that students should be introduced to during the instruction process.

**Tori's paradigm for safety:**

*Can I execute the technique in a slow, smooth, continuous motion, without abrupt gestures, hesitancy, or loss of balance, and with sufficient awareness to compensate if something unanticipated happens?*

If tori cannot meet this paradigm, tori should decline to practice this technique, except under strict individual supervision and with an experienced uke.

**Uke's paradigm for safety:**

*Can I execute the proper ukemi for the technique smoothly, without hesitation, and with sufficient awareness to compensate if something unanticipated happens?*
If uke cannot meet this paradigm, uke should decline to receive this technique, and to practice the appropriate ukemi under strict individual supervision.

**General paradigms**

*The first iteration in the practice of any technique is a safety audit.* Tori uses it to gauge her ability to execute the technique safely. Uke uses it to gauge his ability to receive the technique safely. Each must then evaluate the situation against the appropriate paradigm. *This first iteration must be done slowly.* You cannot evaluate the safety of a technique if your attention is subsumed by the execution of technique itself.

*Uke controls the speed of the technique, not tori.* The speed of the technique is determined by the speed of the attack. *A slow attack is an indication that uke is not prepared to receive the technique at tori's full speed.*

It is tori's responsibility to modulate the speed of the technique to uke's attack.

It is uke's responsibility to attack at a speed appropriate to his or her ability level. Sudden changes in the pace of a technique indicate that someone's safety is in jeopardy.

*If a technique results in a bad fall, tori and uke share joint responsibility to correct the problem.* Each should conduct a safety audit, which means evaluating the safety paradigm for the technique in question. If either cannot meet the paradigm they should not practice this technique with each other. If both are confident, then each must consciously adjust to compensate for the bad fall from now on.

Tori must do the technique slower, more smoothly, and with less strength.

Uke must reconcile the proper ukemi with tori's motion during the technique.

*As uke, a student must understand the proper ukemi for the technique he is receiving, and he must execute the ukemi in a manner consistent with the technique.* There is at least one proper ukemi for each technique in the system. If the student does not understand how to execute a proper breakfall for a given technique he should recognize that the appropriate action is to ask for assistance. Trying to determine personally acceptable ukemi for a given technique is exceptionally dangerous.

*As tori, a student must understand the proper ukemi for the technique she is practicing, and she must execute the technique in a manner consistent with the proper ukemi.* If the student does not understand how uke will react to her technique she should recognize that the appropriate action, again, is to ask for assistance. If her technique is more than cosmetically different from that which the proper ukemi requires the same situation applies. Personal experimentation in technique is only acceptable if uke is aware that tori's technique differs from the norm and is sufficiently experienced to compensate for tori's actions at any time.

Above all, students should be aware of the safety of both tori and uke at all times. The red flags
for safety are:
  - hesitancy
  - abrupt changes in pace, or sudden motions,
  - use of strength.

Part of the current culture that needs to shift, regardless of the desirability of this specific
proposal, is the focus of practice between tori and uke. Currently, both tori and uke's attention
are on tori's technique, and all feedback seems directed at improving that technique. Some of that
attention needs to be redirected to uke's ukemi, both for the benefit of uke's safety, but also
because, as O'Sensei suggested, good technique and good ukemi reinforce each other.

**On Right Side Bias**

Why practice ukemi on both sides when (almost) all technique is practiced on one side, and, as a
result, students need only to take falls on one side?

First it should be noted that there are some "left-sided" ukemi in the system. The *tensho aiki* at
shodan from right and left, 2-on-1 wrist, 2-on-1 elbow and crosstwist (if taken as a roll) attacks
require a left-side forward roll. In addition, *maki geashi* at ikkyu and *crosstwist (sutemi)* at
shodan must be taken as either left-side rolls or right-side forward flips. Lastly, *tomoe nage* and
*sumea geashi* may be taken as forward rolls on either side.

As most senior students in class are well-aware, it is exceptionally difficult to develop a technique
on the "wrong" side having spent years practicing exclusively on one side. This is true for ukemi,
and perhaps more so, since ukemi seems to naturally get "wired-in" at a motor level more strongly
than most throwing technique. Thus students with a side bias in ukemi tend to have their instincts
betray them when first exposed to the preceding techniques. They try to execute ukemi that they
know, despite the fact that body position and available limbs are incompatible. This seems very
difficult to overcome.

More generally, ukemi is the "safety-net" of the throwing arts. We have all seen situations where
a technique has failed catastrophically and bodies have flown in totally unanticipated directions
and orientations. Students need to be able to fall safely on both sides because there is no
guarantee that an accident will happen on a student's "good side".
II. Review of the Existing System

The existing system consists of ten techniques, nine of which are formally tested under the title of *Sutemi Waza*. For convenience, the suggested term for the new curriculum is included in the following list with each existing name. They are:

1. Simple sit down fall (Back Breakfall)
2. One leg squat (Side Breakfall)
3. Reverse squat (Reverse Side Breakfall)
4. Forward sutemi (roll) (Forward Roll)
5. Forward roll turnabout (deleted)
6. Barrier sutemi (unchanged)
7. Handstand sutemi (deleted)
8. Bayonet sutemi (unchanged)
9. Lapel okuri (deleted)

In addition, the *Forward Breakfall* is also taught, but not formally tested.

For each ukemi in the existing system, it seems important to understand the role it plays as *ukemi*. An argument can be made that *sutemi waza* is, quite literally, rolling technique, i.e. throwing technique based on breakfalls.

1. Back Breakfall (Simple Sit Down Fall)

As ukemi:  *tackle ouchi* (nikyu), *kane sute* (ikkyu)
As sutemi waza:  *tomoe nage* (nikyu), *maki geashi* (ikkyu)

The first technique requiring a true back breakfall ukemi is *tackle ouchi*, for nikyu. The only other technique up to and including black belt material which uses a back breakfall ukemi is *kane sute*, for ikkyu. As *sutemi waza*, a back breakfall is needed for *tomoe nage* at nikyu and for *maki geashi* at ikkyu. The back breakfall also serves as a transition to the all-important side breakfall (one leg squat).

The back breakfall is introduced as ukemi at white belt, and tested as a demonstration for the yellow belt; i.e. the student performs the *ukemi* in isolation, without a throw from tori. Students learning *tackle ouchi* at sankyu and *kane sute* at nikyu require instruction on making the transition from the demonstrated back breakfall to using it as ukemi from the throw. There is excellent consistency among senior students in teaching the back breakfall. There is a very well-defined progression of increasing sophistication to the technique, albeit of only two levels: from squatting and from standing.

2. Side Breakfall (One Leg Squat)
As ukemi:  
*osoto gari* (yellow), *hip throws* (green), many others

As sutemi waza:  
*tani otooshi* (green), *drop sashı ashi* (shodan)

The side breakfall is the ukemi used for almost all non-joint-based throws in the system. It is applicable at white belt for *osoto gari* and requires increasing refinement for higher and faster throws at each new belt level. Notable landmarks are *ogoshi* and *tani otooshi* at green, *inside lift* at sankyu, *side thunderbolt* at nikyu, and *harai goshi* at shodan. The side breakfall serves as a transition to the forward breakfall. As *sutemi waza*, the side breakfall is needed for green belt in *tani otooshi* and for shodan in *drop sashı ashi*. It also serves as a transition to the reverse side breakfall (reverse squat).

The side breakfall is introduced as ukemi at white belt, and tested as a demonstration for the yellow belt. Students tend to undergo a rude awakening upon attaining the yellow belt, when they first use the side breakfall as ukemi for basic hip throws. The white belt *osoto gari*, as executed by white belts, does not appear to provide a sufficient environment for students to grasp the application of the side breakfall, as *ukemi*. There is a well-understood folklore among green belts as to the progression of bruises one obtains learning to take ukemi for hip throws. By the time a student tests for green belt, she is fairly comfortable taking ukemi for basic hip throws. The ante increases each time a higher or faster throw is introduced at the next belt rank. There is very good consistency among senior students in teaching the side breakfall. There is a fairly good progression of increasing sophistication to the technique. There is some confusion as to whether the finishing position for the side breakfall is identical to the forward breakfall, i.e., bottom leg bent, top leg straight. It is not intuitive how to finish with the bottom leg bent when demonstrating the side breakfall by "stepping out" with the bottom leg. There is no structured transition to the "formal" side breakfall as practiced in *judo*, i.e., where the bottom leg is raised off the ground and the student squats on the top leg to enter the fall. Students expect to test on the "stepping out" form of the breakfall, although this requirement is not clearly defined.

3. Reverse Side Breakfall (Reverse Squat)

As ukemi:  
No application

As sutemi waza:  
*yoko guruma* (ikkyu)

The reverse side breakfall does not appear to have an application as *ukemi*. As *sutemi waza*, it is needed for *yoko guruma* for ikkyu.

The reverse side breakfall is introduced at white belt after the side breakfall, and tested as a demonstration for the yellow belt. There is a significant learning curve in moving from the relatively static breakfall as taught at white belt (and as practiced from thereon) when a student is eventually introduced to its application at nikyu. In particular, the breakfall is taught with a single-hand slap akin to the side breakfall, whereas the application requires both hands be in contact with uke for the entire throw.
4. Forward Roll (Forward Sutemi)

As ukemi:  
*tomoe nage* (nikiyu), *kapel guruma* yoko *guruma* (ikkyu), *tensho aiki* (shodan)

As sutemi waza:  
No application (before nidan)

The forward roll is first used as ukemi for *tomoe nage* for nikiyu, then for *kapel guruma* and *yoko guruma* at ikkyu, and finally for *tensho aiki* at shodan. It does not have an application as sutemi waza until nidan. There is considerable confusion at even upper belt ranks as to whether this is a one or a two-handed roll, likely due in part to the other sutemi waza in the system. As *ukemi*, it is necessarily a one-handed roll because throwing technique requires uke to be leading with one leg and one arm.

The forward roll is introduced at white belt after students are reasonably comfortable with the back and side breakfalls. It is tested as a demonstration for the green belt. Some particular observations on student use of the forward roll in class:

a. Unlike the back and side breakfall, there is essentially no consistency between senior students in teaching the forward roll. Of particular concern is the lack of a clearly defined ukemi "concept" for the roll, i.e., what aspects of the roll to emphasize to improve the student's ability to use it as ukemi. Many students use a two-handed, somersault-like roll with dubious ukemi properties.

b. There is no clear transition to increasing levels of sophistication in rolling technique, as *ukemi*. There is a de facto approach to teaching white belts how to reach a testable "demonstration" roll. Beyond the demonstration, rolling emphasis shifts to the *handsstand, barrier* and *beyonet sutemi*. As practiced, these do not appear to contribute to ukemi skills, and may even be detrimental (for each sutemi, this is discussed in detail later). Hence, student rolling ukemi skills reach a demonstration level at green belt and then either plateau or atrophy as students concentrate on the preceding exercises.

c. Many students favor the right side in learning the roll and can reach senior status without a functional left-side roll. See the section "On Right-Side Bias" for a discussion of this issue.

d. The first application of the forward roll, *tomoe nage*, is a critical transition for most students. It comes completely out of the blue. Many students' instinctive response to *tomoe nage* is to take it as *barrier sutemi* as demonstrated by jumping over the bar. This is incorrect and quite dangerous. Discussion of the lack of application of the "bar jumping" exercise is deferred to the section on *barrier sutemi*.

5. Forward breakfall
As ukemi: Transition to forward flip
As sutemi waza: No application

Although the forward breakfall as taught does not have an apparent application as ukemi or sutemi waza, it is a natural transitional exercise toward the forward flip.

The forward breakfall is introduced at white belt after students are reasonably comfortable with the forward roll. It is tested as a demonstration for the green belt. Since the forward flip is not formally taught in class, the forward breakfall is perceived by students to be divorced from context. There is no linear objective, eg. jump higher, jump farther, and no obvious use for the technique. Most \textit{prima facie} applications of the forward breakfall are technically forward flips. In essence, the forward flip is the forward breakfall executed without the rolling arm touching the ground. The transition from forward breakfall to forward flip is not conceptually straightforward and requires specific training exercises for safety.

Like the side breakfall, there is some confusion as to interpretation of final leg position in the forward breakfall. Currently, the technique is taught to be consistent with the side breakfall: bottom leg bent, top leg straight. Most Aikido and Hapkido styles have few hip throws, and hence much less use for the side breakfall, so students with previous background in these arts tend to use a forward flip with one leg straight and one leg bent at the knee so the ball of the foot is a point of contact.

6. Forward roll tumaabout

As ukemi: As forward roll.
As sutemi waza: No application

This roll is no longer practiced, except on very rare occasions by senior belts. Conceptually, it is just a forward roll in which uke comes up facing back in the direction of tori.

7. Barrier sutemi

As ukemi: No application (as taught)
As sutemi waza: No application

This roll does not appear to have a direct application to ukemi, as practiced. The concept of clearing a barrier in taking a roll is consistent with \textit{tomoe nage}, \textit{sume geashi}, and \textit{sutemi strangle}. However, each of these techniques necessarily requires the student to have one foot and one arm leading to execute a clean, safe roll, which is not how the barrier sutemi is practiced, or promoted.

The barrier sutemi is introduced informally when a student develops sufficient rolling proficiency. The student is simply asked to join the line of senior students lined-up. There are two forms of
the barrier sutemi, as practiced:

*Jumping crouching students.* The exercise starts with one student crouching down approximately ten feet from the start of the line of students. Students take turns running toward the croucher, jumping over, and usually executing a two-handed somersault-like roll. Some students use a proper forward roll, but stick to only the right-side. After all students have had two or more chances, the number of crouching students is increased to two and the cycle repeats. Eventually three or even four crouchers may be used. The clear goal, as perceived by most students, is to gain distance in the jump. Most students develop this by increasing the speed at which they run at the crouchers, tempered by their ability to survive the roll on the other end.

It is not clear how this exercise relates to either ukemi or sutemi waza. The use of speed is detrimental to the notion of clearing a barrier as ukemi, as in *tomoe nage*. In *tomoe* the uke cannot rely on control of forward motion to execute a proper breakfall since tori adds energy to uke's fall, by definition. Speed of motion, as needed for ukemi, is disjoint, as would be the case if students walked up to the croucher and then accelerated into the jump with a single step. Speed for the purpose of clearing distance is also inconsistent with the use of barrier sutemi as sutemi waza, as in *sutemi strangle*. Someone launching to clear eight or ten feet of horizontal distance beyond uke in a sutemi strangle would obviously carry both himself and uke, into a very dangerous and uncontrolled skid. Speed and distance also promote the use of the two-handed, somersault-like roll, which, on miscalculation, results in the unfortunate student smacking his lower back.

It should be noted that an effective use of the barrier sutemi for self defense was demonstrated by Harry Sherman. When instructing a group of students in the forward roll, he introduced the image of the students as presenting a physical danger to him, and then promptly bounded into a roll which carried him a good twelve feet away almost instantaneously. If this is the intended purpose of barrier sutemi, it is compelling. It leaves open the question of the legitimate need for a barrier sutemi for ukemi. Note, also that Harry's roll was from a static position.

*Jumping the bar.* The exercise starts with one of the black belt instructors holding a bo staff horizontally, at a distance of about ten feet from the start of the line of students. Students take turns running up to and then jumping the bar. The instructor sets the bar at an appropriate height for the student. Students indicate whether the bar is too high or too low with hand gestures. The bar is often raised for a student's second, and third, jump. Some students can clear the bar at chest or even shoulder height. Height is perceived as the clear goal of the exercise. Almost without exception, students take the breakfall as a two-handed roll because enough height is achieved to make the fall a headfirst plunge toward the mat.

It should first be noted that some students consider this exercise to be at best unintentionally intimidating, and at worst, deliberately so. It is not clear how the exercise relates to either ukemi or sutemi waza. In point of fact, the preferred method of gaining height, as amply demonstrated and acknowledged by Don Geddis, is based on *volleyball skills*. The method involves running
toward the bar, planting both feet side by side, flexing the knees, and then exploding upwards and over using the stored momentum. The necessary landing requires the student to get his hips over the bar, and then drop straight toward the mat with both hands outstretched, absorbing enough energy using both arms to carry into a roll. This approach is a direct contradiction of good rolling technique in several respects, some of which are related to the preceding comments on the crouching-student barrier.

a. Using speed to control height (like distance) is unreliable for ukemi because tori adds energy to a technique. This problem manifests itself in students' ongoing difficulty in safely executing rolling ukemi, such as from tomoe nage. Ukemi is reactive.

b. It is exceptionally difficult for uke to control the positioning of her feet upon taking ukemi. Thus, the reinforcement of the need to plant both feet in a specific position in order to achieve a good barrier sutemi directly undermines the need to free the student of dependence on foot position. Again, ukemi is reactive. It should also be noted that having both feet together is a highly unrealistic position for an uke, in the role of attacker, to have. Some students manifest clear difficulty in dissociating foot position from ukemi.

c. The purpose of ukemi is to absorb energy so that uke is not injured by a technique. Jumping for height encourages students to add energy. In a throw with both tori and uke adding energy to the technique, the potential for dangerously uncontrolled motion is heightened.

d. Most students develop enough height practicing the exercise to make the fall a vertical drop toward the mat, head first. This necessitates the use of both hands to absorb the shock from landing. Unfortunately, it also serves to reinforce the use of both hands for ukemi. Using both hands squares the shoulders relative to the rolling line, reducing the ability to roll over the circumference of one arm (as in a proper forward roll) and increasing the likelihood of a somersault-like motion, with consequent risk to the head, neck and lower back. Most of our techniques requiring rolling ukemi put a torque on the body that makes a square, two-handed roll difficult to enter. Reliance on two-handed rolling also makes the transition to the flip more difficult. Some students have demonstrated a dangerous tendency to reach toward the ground with the free hand (i.e., the slapping hand) from a technique requiring a flip. This is extremely dangerous.

Given enough upward momentum, a few students can take the fall as a side breakfall. This is not appreciably higher than the fall from kata guruma. It is not clear what learning advantage, if any, this presents. Two benefits of jumping the bar have been suggested. They are:

a. At a certain point, the exercise gives a student confidence that she can handle a fall from any height that might reasonably occur in a combat situation, eg, from a botched flying tackle.
b. When the bar is held at a low level it forces students to get their hips up into the roll. This effect disappears entirely beyond waist height, when the fall ceases to be a roll.

These do not appear to compensate for the problems caused by the exercise. It has also been suggested that in the general framework of self-defense, the ability to dive over an intervening obstacle could be important. Of course, one might then ask how much one gains committing to such a (relatively) uncontrolled, although faster, fall relative to a vaulting motion, in the case where one cannot see beyond the obstacle. Are we practicing the ability to jump low chain-link fences?

The technique is rarely tested as demonstration for the green belt.

8. Handstand sutemi

As ukemi: No application
As sutemi waza: No application

For clarification, this technique is considered to be an entry into a handstand from a standing position, followed by a drop into a two-handed roll. It does not appear to have an application as either ukemi or sutemi waza.

The handstand sutemi is introduced informally once students are comfortable enough with the forward roll and forward breakfall. It is used, increasingly with less frequency, as a warm-up exercise following the forward roll and forward breakfall. The technique seems to serve mainly as a transition to jumping over the bar and to the bayonet sutemi. Most students do not execute the handstand and simply perform a two-handed roll. Hence, it has the same potential problems as the barrier sutemi exercises.

The technique is tested as demonstration for the black belt.

9. Bayonet sutemi

As ukemi: No application
As sutemi waza: No application

For clarification, this exercise is composed of two parts: picking up the long staff (bo) during a roll, and picking up a knife during a roll. It does not appear to have an application as either ukemi or sutemi waza. However, it is has an obvious self-defense application, and is very popular with students, likely for that very reason.

The bayonet sutemi is also introduced informally once students are comfortable enough with the forward roll. The exercise does not appear to suffer from the same shortcomings as the barrier
sutemi and is in fact, conceptually quite distinct from general rolling skills. Proper technique for picking up the staff is clear and well-defined, requiring a student to have one palm "up" and one "down". This alleviates the possibility of a two-handed roll. Proper technique for picking up the knife is less well-defined. Some students use the rolling hand to grab the knife while others use the free hand. In either case, the technique supports a proper one-handed roll.

The technique is tested as demonstration for the black belt.

10. Lapel okuri

As ukemi: is side breakfall
As sutemi waza: is yoko wakari

For clarification, this exercise requires the student to execute a side breakfall as sutemi waza for yoko wakari. It is a straightforward sutemi waza.

11. Front breakfall

As ukemi: scissors rollout (ikkyu), club yawara, cross twist to mat (shodan)
As sutemi waza:

For clarification, this ukemi involves a forward fall in which the student absorbs energy through the forearms and upper thighs. It is taught informally to senior belts but not tested. It is used for scissors rollout at ikkyu and for club yawara and cross twist (to mat) at black belt. It is a fairly simple ukemi, readily learned, and not subject to much individual interpretation. The current approach appears to work very well.

Conclusions

In general, the existing system appears to work reasonably well for the simplest techniques at the lower belt ranks. Beginning with the forward roll, there is less homogeneity of approach and a growing perceived detachment between techniques and exercises and their application to either ukemi or sutemi waza. Formal instruction of technique essentially ceases at yellow belt. Instructors and senior students continue to make informal comments at all levels. The current perceived view of ukemi can be largely encapsulated in one idea: that ukemi is a talent that some students will develop naturally and others will not.
### Summary of Current System

Use  = Use the technique for throws at this rank; learn it if not known previously.
Learn = Learn the technique at this rank for use at a later rank.
Test  = Test the technique to obtain this belt level.

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III. Changes to the Current System

Existing Techniques Which Would Be Removed

1. Reverse side breakfall (reverse squat)

This technique is the throwing motion for *yoko guruma*. Students would learn it within the context of the throw, as is currently done for the throwing motions used in other *waza* such as *tomoe nage*, *maki geashi* and *sutemi strangle*. Given its very limited applicability, and the relative ease with which students develop *yoko guruma*, it does not merit the time or early introduction currently given to it.

2. Forward roll turnabout

This ukemi is currently neither taught nor tested. It has no apparent applicability beyond the forward roll, in any case.

3. Barrier sutemi - *Jumping the bar*

This exercise demonstrably undermines the safety of students' forward rolls. It has no apparent application within the class.

4. Handstand sutemi

This technique demonstrably undermines the safety of students' forward rolls. It has no apparent application within the class.

5. Lapel okuri

This technique is simply *yoko wakari*. It should be tested as technique.

Existing Techniques Which Would Retained

1. Back breakfall.

Instruction of this technique would not change from the current practice. It would be introduced at white belt using the existing methodology and tested at yellow belt.

2. Side breakfall

Instruction of this technique would not change from the current practice. It would be introduced at white belt using the existing methodology and tested at yellow belt.
3. Forward roll

Under the new system, a rigorous methodology of instruction for the forward roll would be implemented. The technique would still be introduced at the white belt level, as is currently done, and the ukemi would still be tested as demonstration for the green belt. However, formal instruction of the ukemi would continue through yellow belt, and yellow belt students would receive individualized feedback on rolling prior to testing for green.

4. Forward breakfall

As in the case of the forward roll, the technique would still be introduced at the white belt level, and the ukemi would still be tested as demonstration for the green belt. However, formal instruction of the ukemi would continue through yellow belt, and yellow belt students would receive individualized feedback on the breakfall prior to testing for green.

5. Front breakfall

Instruction of this technique would not change from the current practice. It would be introduced at green belt using the existing methodology and tested at sankyu.

6. Barrier sutemi

The barrier sutemi would still be introduced at yellow belt but would not be tested until nihon. The revised exercise is focused on the concept of ukemi, meaning that emphasis is on the reaction to a threat of harm resulting from body position during practice in the class. The ukemi itself should be indistinguishable from the appropriate technique without the barrier: forward roll, forward breakfall, side roll or perhaps a flip. Of specific concern is the tendency to take a running start to clear the barrier with height or distance. While this might be appropriate is some exotic self defense situations (i.e. in which one is being pursued and has a clear view of the ground past the obstacle) the goal of the revised exercise is to develop a student's ability to protect himself in class, in a unanticipated situation. Since this precludes the luxury of a running start, the barrier sutemi is taken with at most a single step. Students need to be encouraged to practice both sides.

7. Bayonet sutemi

The current teaching methodology for the barrier sutemi would not change under the proposed system, although it would not be introduced until sankyu to allow junior students more time to work on ukemi. It would be tested as demonstration at ikkyu, with both the staff and the knife.
New Techniques

1. Forward flip

The forward flip protects uke from strain applied to a joint in a joint breaking technique. There are many joint breaking techniques in the system: wrist twist, rear otooshi, forearm otooshi, shiho nage, wrist Guruma, and crosstwist (sutemi). Without the forward flip, uke must resist the technique long enough to shift his body position to take a conventional breakfall, usually a back or side breakfall. Even moderately fast execution of the technique puts a dangerous amount of strain on the vulnerable joint. However, a properly executed forward flip will almost instantly remove all risk to the threatened joint, allowing practice of full speed technique. It is also possible for situations to occur in which uke does not have the luxury of time or position to take any breakfall other than a flip. For example, in lapel Guruma, if tori pulls straight down instead of extending out with the throwing arm uke must take a flip or risk being pulled face first into the mat.

The forward flip would be introduced at sankyu. Applications would be tested at nkyu, ikkyu and shodan, with the demonstration flip tested at ikkyu.
IV. New System

The new curriculum revolves around the introduction of two new charts, to be aptly named Ukemi Demonstration and Ukemi Applications. The demonstration chart is composed of a list of ukemi to be performed without a throw or technique, to test the student's understanding of the basic body motions. This is how ukemi are currently tested. The application chart is intended to look like a standard chart of techniques, except with the colors reversed: a list of throws, in red, followed by the corresponding ukemi, in black. These are ukemi that are performed within the context of a specific throw or technique, and test the student's understanding of how the ukemi applies in that particular case.

The purpose of the charts is to provide a visible focus for the ukemi curriculum. The students will see the entire curriculum presented in the same chart format as weza, therefore holding the same status, and perhaps more importantly, will see ukemi as something that is studied, and improved upon, at all ranks.

Instruction is formalized, at all levels. One thing that should be made clear to students is that while tori is practicing weza, uke is practicing ukemi. Once a student understands the gross motions of a particular ukemi, he or she can practice it in conjunction with the appropriate throwing technique. Thus, the application ukemi do not represent additional material.

The time requirement for studying ukemi is for demonstration, i.e., learning the basic motion of each technique. It appears that this can be as little as fifteen minutes a week, if the time is structured and closely supervised, as all throwing technique is currently.

The remainder of this section comprises an in-depth analysis of which ukemi are to be taught at which levels, how to teach each particular ukemi, and how to test a student's understanding and performance.

1. Back Breakfall

Taught at: white belt
Prerequisites: none
Leads to: side breakfall
Demonstrate for: yellow belt
Applications: tackle ouchi (nikyu), kane sute (ikkkyu)

The methodology for teaching the back breakfall is as follows:

a. Start from a seated position on the mat. The student should practice rolling up onto the back so that the legs come completely off the mat. The objective is to get the back as rounded as possible. The head must not touch the mat.

b. Introduce the notion of slapping the mat as a way to dissipate energy. The proper
slapping orientation is with the arms at or slightly less than ninety degrees. If the arms are at a significantly smaller angle the slap is inefficient. If the angle is more than ninety degrees the slap is dangerous since it can result in shoulder strain. Practice timing the slap while rolling up onto the back. The slap should occur just as the top of the spine touches the mat, ie. at the very last moment of "rolling up".

c. Raise the stakes by starting in a squatting position. The objective now is to sit down, and then roll up and slap just as before. There is a tendency to reach back with the arms. This is equivalent to slapping at a greater than ninety degree angle and must be corrected.

d. When a student can take a smooth back breakfall from a squatting position, he should move to a standing position. To execute the fall from the standing position the student simply squats down first and then performs the fall exactly as before. The objective is to make the motion continuous and unconscious. This level is used to test the breakfall.

Testing requirements:

a. Uke sits smoothly into the breakfall without "flailing backward".
b. Arms slap at 90 degrees or slightly less from the body.
c. Slap is correctly timed.
d. Head is tucked forward at all times and does not contact the mat.

The following applications of back breakfall would be tested at various ranks: tackle ouchi and kane sute. The testing requirements are identical to the demonstration breakfall.

2. Side breakfall

Taught at: white belt
Prerequisites: back breakfall
Leads to: forward breakfall
Demonstrate for: yellow belt
Applications: osoto gari (yellow, green, sankyu), sukai nage, ogoshi, tani otoshi (green, sankyu), inside lift (sankyu), side thunderbolt (nikyu)

The teaching methodology for the side breakfall is as follows:

a. Introduce the notion that the side breakfall is simply "half" a back breakfall, ie. you roll up on one leg instead of two and slap with one leg instead of two.
b. Start by lying on your side on the mat. Now curl your bottom leg up and twist your foot so that it doesn't actually sit on the mat. Lift the upper leg but keep it out straight. Picture yourself kicking someone in the knee with the upper leg. Now place the lower arm on the mat, palm down, at a ninety-degree angle to your body. This is the side breakfall position.
c. Now try sitting on the mat with one leg out straight and the other bent so the foot is tight against the behind. "Roll up" on the side of the bent leg: not straight back and not straight to the side, but at a forty-five degree angle between. Slap with the near arm. The straight leg should remain straight as you roll up. Finish in the side breakfall position.

d. When the roll-up is comfortable, try rolling up straight back, as you would for a back breakfall, but at the pinnacle let your body fall off sideways so you make the side breakfall. Practice coordinating the timing of the slap with the roll up.

e. Now try the following exercise. Start in side breakfall position on the left side. Roll up onto your back, switch your legs, and take a side breakfall on the right side. Roll up onto your back again, switch your legs back to their original orientation, and take a side breakfall on the left side. Continue going back and forth. Practice getting as much of your body as you can off the mat during the roll-up and try to come down in one "piece", so you a single thump.

f. Stand up. Step forward with one leg. Now sink down on the back leg until you can roll up, and then take a side breakfall on the leg that was forward, i.e. if you stepped out with the left leg you should finish with the left leg bent and on the mat.

g. You are now ready for the formal breakfall. Start in a standing position. Now raise one leg to the side, holding it straight, and squat down on the remaining leg until you can roll up. The leg you raised should finish bent, and on the mat. This simulates a balance break in which uke is pulled-off the straight leg and left standing only on the squatting leg. This level is used to test the breakfall.

Testing requirements (Right, Left):

a. Uke lands on the side of the body, not the back.

b. Slapping arm is less than 90 degrees from the body.

c. Slap is correctly timed.

d. Legs finish in "figure 4" position, bent leg on the mat.

The following applications of side breakfall would be tested at various ranks: *osoto gari, sukui nage, ogoshi, tani otoshi, inside lift,* and *side thunderbolt.* The testing requirements are identical to the demonstration breakfall.

3. **Forward Roll**

Taught at: white belt  
Prerequisites: none  
Leads to: forward breakfall  
Demonstrate for: green belt  
Applications: *tomoe nage* (nikyu), *kapel guruma, yoko guruma* (ikkyu), *tensho aiki* (shodan)
The methodology for teaching the forward roll is as follows:

a. Introduce the notion of the *circle of iron*. This is the metaphor for the proper arm position in the forward roll. The idea is that the circle is strong and resistant - it cannot be collapsed - but it also flexible and resilient, not rigid. You want your body to be like the circle of iron while rolling. If you collapse or go limp, you'll drop your shoulder onto the mat as weight slides over your arm. If you are too rigid, you'll become a box, and bang the corners (elbow, shoulder, lower back) as you roll. There should be no impact when you roll, and hence no sound. To form the circle of iron:
   i. Pretend you're holding on to a very large tree trunk.
   ii. Now rotate your palms outwards so you can see the backs of your hands.

b. Introduce the roll from a kneeling position. This removes some of the natural fear associated with rolling from a standing height. The crucial concepts to get across are:
   i. You must maintain the circle of iron while rolling.
   ii. Ukemi is a way to *absorb* energy, so you want to use as little of your own energy to roll as possible. The less energy you put in, the smoother the roll will be.

To start the roll from a kneeling position:

i. Start with your left knee on the ground, *circle of iron* in front of you.
ii. Now rotate the *circle* toward the ground (by moving your right shoulder slightly forward) so that the edge of your right hand just touches the mat.
iii. You are now going to roll over your entire right arm, up to the shoulder and then, diagonally, down your back from right shoulder to left hip. Do not hurl yourself into the roll. Take the roll as slowly as possible. The hard part is not letting your arm collapse. If you feel any impact, anywhere on your body, that is a signal that you are letting your arm collapse as you roll. You can take the roll very slowly, as long as you keep the rolling arm strong.

If a student is collapsing the arm while rolling, have them stand up and go over to face a wall (this is not a punishment). They should try the following exercise:

i. Make the *circle of iron* and drop the left arm.
ii. Back up so that you need to lean on your right arm to keep yourself from falling toward the wall. Essentially, you are doing a standing push-up on the edge of your right hand (what we call the *blade* of the hand). Feel the muscle strength you need to support your body weight - it isn't very much. Now step back slightly farther and allow yourself to fall onto your right handblade. Practice until you are comfortable keeping your right arm strong. Go back and try rolling again.

If the student still has difficulty they can try an even lower roll:
i. Get down on both knees, leaving space between them.

ii. Put your right arm between your knees until your right shoulder is touching the mat. Now roll. Continue until you feel comfortable enough to try the one knee up posture.

Other diagnostic issues:

If the student is **barrel-rolling**, i.e., rolling sideways, she needs to square her shoulders *slightly* in the direction of the roll. You need to be able to look in the direction you're rolling.

If the student **rolls off at an angle**, the lead foot is likely at an angle relative to the desired line of the roll. It should point in the direction of the roll.

If the student is **somersaulting** or rolling on both arms he needs to shift the shoulder of the rolling arm *slightly* forward so that the handblade of the rolling arm can fully touch the mat. The other arm is not used in the roll. Why is a somersault incorrect? There are two reasons. First, a roll square down the spine obviously puts more stress, and potential for impact, directly on the spine. Second, rolling ukemi naturally occur with one of uke's legs in front of the other so in *an ukemi*, as opposed to a static roll, uke will not be able to somersault effectively.

Once the student is reasonably proficient at entering the roll, the finishing posture should be developed. Formally, the finishing posture for the roll is identical to the starting posture, so a kneeling roll finishes in a kneeling position while a standing roll finishes in the appropriate zenkutsodachi (See the following discussion for the transition from kneeling to standing rolls). The key to finishing in the correct position is to *tuck the back leg* as tightly as possible against one's backside. Also, it helps to tense the stomach muscles to pull into a ball while rolling. The two overwhelmingly common errors in finishing a roll are to let the body relax part way through the roll, which dumps the student on his back, or to the back leg relax, which results in a straight leg at the finish.

Once the student is comfortable rolling on the right hand side from the kneeling position they develop the left side. It is important that students maintain parallel development of both sides. There is a tendency to move to a standing roll on one side while still having difficulty with the kneeling roll on the other side. This should be strongly discouraged.

c. When the student is comfortable rolling from one knee down on both sides, she should try it from a standing posture:

i. Start with your right leg forward. You are going to roll over the right arm.
ii. Make the circle of iron.

iii. Rotate the circle and bend at the waist until your right hand is just touching the ground.

iv. Don't throw yourself into the roll, just let gravity take you over. The rolling arm must remain strong.

v. Finish in the same kneeling posture as you did previously, right knee up, left knee down for a right roll.

vi. When you feel comfortable, allow the momentum to take you back up to a standing posture.

Any difficulty in performing the standing roll should immediately trigger a return to the kneeling roll. The student cannot be allowed to "fudge" the ukemi. It must be completely unconscious and consistent. At some point, the student should cease needing the mental pause to make the circle of iron. The rolling arm should come into position naturally as the standing roll begins. The other arm should be free to slap, although this is not necessary. There is some tendency to "spool" the roll, meaning that the student pushes the rolling arm under his body so that the upper arm rather than the handblade makes first contact with the mat and the roll occurs much faster. This is diametrically in opposition to the desired development of the roll. As ukemi, the roll should be as slow and extended as possible, to absorb the maximum amount of energy.

When the student is proficient in rolling on the right side from a standing posture he should develop the left side. Once the left side is consistent he should alternate right and left side rolls from then on.

Testing requirements (Right, Left):

a. Students begins in a formal stance.
b. No mental pause before the start of the roll.
c. Rolling arm moves into position naturally during the start of the roll.
d. No use of the other arm during the roll, except an optional slap at the end.
e. Handblade is the first part of the rolling arm to touch the mat, and the entire arm contacts the mat in turn.
f. Roll is reasonably quiet.
g. Students finishes in the same stance as she started with.

The following applications of the forward roll would be tested at various ranks: tomoe noage, kapel guruma, yoko guruma, and tensho aiki. The testing requirements are identical to the demonstration breakfall.

Many refinements can be made to the forward roll. Although they would not be formally tested, students should be encouraged to experiment with the following exercises, perhaps under
supervision.

a. Make the roll quieter.
b. Make the other arm totally irrelevant to the roll. Can you tuck it into your gi?
c. Make your head position totally irrelevant to the roll. Can you look any direction while you roll? Can you close your eyes while you roll?
d. Make your stance irrelevant to the roll. This is the ultimate goal, and the most difficult. In principle, you want to be able to take a roll in any direction without having to turn to face that direction. Start in a formal front stance but shift your rolling arm off at thirty to forty-five degrees, i.e., if you're facing north, try taking a right hand roll north-east. You should finish in a front stance facing north-east. Gradually increase the angle of your roll with respect to your starting stance. Can you face north and roll straight east, finishing facing east? Can you face north and make a forward right hand roll southeast? Can you face north and make a forward right hand roll south? The key, aside from patience and lots of practice, is to learn to start the roll on the rolling arm, but delay turning into the roll until the arm is actually on the mat.

4. Forward Breakfall

Taught at: white belt
Prerequisites: forward roll, side breakfall
Leads to: forward flip
Demonstrate for: yellow belt
Applications: Lightening throw (nikyu), kata guruma (shodan)

Students must have a functional understanding of both the side breakfall and the forward roll to develop this ukemi effectively. In particular, there is a significant potential for confusion between the forward breakfall and the forward roll. Once a student has a good understand of both prerequisite ukemi, it should be fairly straightforward to make the transition to the forward breakfall.

The methodology for teaching the forward breakfall is as follows:

a. Establish that a forward breakfall is simply a forward roll that ends in the side breakfall position.
b. Start by taking a forward roll, but as you go over, keep the mental image of the side breakfall position in mind. Instead of tucking your legs, let them extend out. Remember to land completely on your side.
c. You have to be aggressive about using the back leg to actually "slap" the mat in the finishing posture. Otherwise, there is a tendency to just let the legs go limp. The forward breakfall is no less crisp than the forward roll. If anything, it looks and feels sharper.
d. Crucial points to emphasize:
   i. It is imperative to have a strong rolling arm as you go over. This is ukemi, so the
      objective is to remove as much energy as possible. The broader you make the
      circle, ie. the rounder and firmer the rolling arm, the more energy will be absorbed.
   ii. The back leg at the start of the roll is the leg which finishes on the mat. You can
      control whether you do a forward roll or a forward breakfall by either tucking the
      back leg for a roll, or straightening it for a breakfall.
   iii. The other arm must slap into the breakfall, at an angle no more than ninety degrees
      to the body, just like side breakfall.
   iv. It is important not to "roll up" at the end of the breakfall. Practice staying "down",
      completely on your side when you finish the breakfall. To help, try using your
      stomach muscles to force your body to uncurl as you slap the mat, and arch your
      back slightly.

Like the forward roll, there is some tendency for the student to "spool" the breakfall,
meaning that the rolling arm is pushed back and under the body to add energy and make
the impact sharper. This is diametrically in opposition to the ukemi concept. The
breakfall should be as large and slow as possible. To get a crisp impact, the student
should focus on maintaining enough firmness in the rolling arm to get the body almost
vertical (ie. upside down) upon entry into the breakfall.

The most common error in the forward breakfall is the tendency to "curl up" out of the
side breakfall position. This is usually a result of the student not being fully on his side at
the finish or of not having the bottom leg bent. Many students also find it difficult to
"figure 4" the legs at the end. This is extremely important: if the legs are not in
opposition, bottom leg bent, top leg straight, there is a good chance of smacking the knees
or ankles together.

Testing requirements (Right, Left):

   a. Student begins in a formal stance.
   b. No mental pause before the start of the breakfall
   c. Rolling arm moves into position naturally during the start of the breakfall
   d. No use of the other arm during the breakfall, except to slap at the end.
   e. Handblade is the first part of the rolling arm to touch the mat, and the entire arm
      contacts the mat in turn.
   f. Student lands on the side of the body, not the back.
   g. Slapping arm is less than 90 degrees from the body.
   h. Slap is correctly timed.
   i. Legs finish in "figure 4" position, bent leg on the mat.

The following applications of the forward breakfall would be tested at various ranks: lightening
throw and kata guruma. The testing requirements are similar to the demonstration breakfall, but
do not involve a rolling entry.

5. **Front Breakfall**

   Taught at: green belt  
   Prerequisites: none  
   Leads to: none  
   Demonstrate for: sankyu  
   Applications: *scissor rollup* (ikkyu), *club yawara*, *cross twist to mat* (shodan)

   The methodology for teaching the front breakfall is as follows:

   a. Start kneeling on the mat, torso upright. Cross your arms in front of your chest, palms facing inward toward your body. Allow yourself to fall toward the mat but instead of trying to catch yourself with your hands, use your entire forearms to slap the mat as you land.
   b. When you are comfortable taking the fall from your knees, try it from a standing position. This level is used to test the breakfall.

   Testing requirements:

   a. Arm motion is a slap, rather than an attempt to catch the body on the hands.
   b. Motion is smooth.

   The following applications of front breakfall would be tested at various ranks: *scissor rollup*, *club yawara*, and *cross twist (to mat)*. The testing requirements are identical to the demonstration breakfall.

6. **Barrier Sutemi**

   Taught at: yellow belt  
   Prerequisites: forward roll (forward breakfall, side roll, flips)  
   Leads to: none  
   Demonstrate for: nikyu  
   Applications: none

   The barrier sutemi is a practice exercise to develop a student's ability to clear a small obstacle, in particular a crouching uke or tori. The exercise is focused on the concept of *ukemi*, meaning that emphasis is on the reaction to a threat of harm resulting from body position during *practice in the class*. The ukemi itself should be indistinguishable from the appropriate technique without the barrier: forward roll, forward breakfall, side roll or perhaps a flip. Of specific concern is the tendency to take a running start to clear the barrier with height or distance. While this might be
appropriate is some exotic self defense situations (ie. in which one is being pursued and has a clear view of the ground past the obstacle) the goal of the exercise is to develop a student's ability to protect himself in class, in a unanticipated situation. Since this precludes the luxury of a running start, the barrier sutemi is taken with at most a single step. Students need to be encouraged to practice both sides.

The methodology for teaching the barrier sutemi is as follows:

a. Place two sticks at some distance apart on the mat, perhaps one foot. Students should then take forward rolls over the two sticks, with the requirement that the leading foot cannot step beyond the closer stick, and the rolling hand cannot be pulled back behind the far stick, ie. no part of the student's body can touch the mat between the two sticks. This forces the student to firm up the rolling arm. The three most common errors in this exercise are to try to take a two-handed roll, which is strictly detrimental to the learning process, and to jump into the roll. Students should be dissuaded from using energy to enter the roll. The slower the roll, the better a student learns the importance of a firm rolling arm. As students become more adept, the sticks can be moved farther apart, until a small jump is physically necessary to clear the distance. At this point the student is ready to begin working on clearing a vertical barrier.

b. There are six possible levels for the barrier:

i. Uke lies prone on the mat.
ii. Uke crouches in a tight ball, knees flush to the chest.
iii. Uke is on all fours.
iv. There are two ukes on all fours, side by side.
v. Uke is bent over, knees slightly bent, back parallel to the mat.
vi. There are two ukes bent over, side by side.

Students should begin with the first level and move up as proficiency is reached at each new level. It should be reiterated that even with the highest level barrier, students should still be executing proper forward rolls. Obviously the highest level barrier represents a considerable challenge.

c. To execute a forward breakfall as a barrier sutemi, the rolling arm touches uke's back instead of the ground on the far side, as if the student had tried to clear the obstacle and failed to get sufficient horizontal distance. To take a very slow and smooth forward breakfall, the student should let the rolling arm come down just slightly in front of uke's back so that the shoulder is the first part of the body to touch uke. This is only possible if uke is on all fours, or higher. This is an advanced exercise, and in fact, is part of the training for the forward flip.

Testing is based on the third level barrier, with one uke on all fours.

Testing requirements: (Right, Left)
a. Student begins in a formal stance.
b. No mental pause before the start of the roll.
c. Rolling arm moves into position naturally during the start of the roll.
d. No use of the other arm during the roll, except an optional slap at the end.
e. Handblade is the first part of the rolling arm to touch the mat, and the entire arm contacts the mat in turn.
f. Roll is reasonably quiet.
g. Student finishes in the same stance as she started with.

The barrier sutemi is not used in any applications. A few techniques, such as *tomoe nage* and *sutemi strangle* might be viewed as related to the barrier sutemi.

7. **Bayonet Sutemi**

Taught at: sankyu  
Prerequisites: forward roll  
Leads to: none  
Demonstrate for: ikkyu  
Applications: none

The bayonet sutemi is not ukemi, but a practical self defense technique for picking up a weapon quickly and with minimal personal risk. Its popularity among students is a testament to the clarity of its application. The technique is tested as demonstration at ikkyu, with both the staff and the knife.

The methodology for teaching bayonet sutemi is as follows:

a. Try the knife first. Pick up the knife as you roll. You have the option of using either the rolling arm or the free arm. If using the free arm, be careful not to turn the roll into a two-handed somersault.

b. Try rolling on the other side.

c. When comfortable picking up the knife, try the staff. Start with one hand palm down and one hand palm up. **The hand with the palm down is the rolling arm.** You will not have as much freedom to move the rolling arm as you would in a normal forward roll. Grasp the staff in thirds. There is a tendency to have the hands too close together when you reach for the staff.

d. Try rolling on the other side.

Testing requirements (Staff):
a. Student begins in a formal stance.
b. The staff is lying on the ground, about a body-length from the student.
c. No mental pause before the start of the roll.
d. Hands are oriented correctly, with one palm-up and one palm-down, grasping the staff at approximately one-third and two-thirds of the length.
e. It is not a two-handed roll, ie. the student uses the arm corresponding to the palm-down hand as the rolling arm and does not do a somersault.
f. Roll is reasonably quiet.
g. Students finishes in the same stance as she started with.

Testing requirements (Knife):

a. Student begins in a formal stance.
b. The knife is lying on the mat, about a body-length from the student.
c. No mental pause before the start of the roll.
d. Rolling arm moves into position naturally during the start of the roll.
e. Handblade is the first part of the rolling arm to touch the mat, and the entire arm contacts the mat in turn.
f. If the student chooses to pick up the knife with the free hand, that hand is not used for the roll, ie. it is not a two-handed roll.
g. Roll is reasonably quiet.
h. Students finishes in the same stance as she started with.

8. **Forward flip**

Taught at: sankyu
Prerequisites: forward breakfall
Leads to: none
Demonstrate for: ikkyu
Applications: *inside arm*twist, wrist twist (nikyu), wrist garuma, ude tori—rear otoshi (ikkyu), barflex—rear otoshi, cross twist sutemi, shiho nage (shodan)

The forward flip is an advanced ukemi. It requires time and effort on the part of the student to develop, and clear and focused training to refine. It is also the end product of a sequence of more basic techniques which the student needs to unite, conceptually: *side breakfall*, *forward roll*, and *forward breakfall*. In principle, the forward flip is simply a forward breakfall in which the rolling arm does not contact the ground. The technique is first introduced at sankyu. Applications are tested at niku, ikkyu and shodan, with the demonstration flip tested at ikkyu.

The methodology for teaching the forward flip is as follows. For initial safety and student confidence, it may be desirable to use the soft blue mats at the introduction of each exercise.
a. The student must be capable of consistently executing a smooth forward breakfall, with particular attention on the ability to, perhaps paradoxically, roll over the entire rolling arm. The purpose of this requirement is not to emphasize rolling, but rather to ensure that the student has a concept of the proper body motion. Unlike a forward roll, the forward flip requires the student to rotate about the center of inertia rather than "falling" into the breakfall. A student can "cheat" on the forward breakfall by essentially taking it as a forward roll that spills out into side breakfall position at the very end. The desired motion requires the student to invert the body completely during the forward breakfall (ie. head down, feet up) and land as a unit on the mat.

b. Once a student demonstrates good forward breakfall ability (on both sides!), she can begin to work on taking the fall from height. The first step is to execute a forward breakfall over another student lying prone, ie. level one barrier sutemi. The objective is not to jump over the prone student, but rather to place the handblade of the rolling arm on his back. This gives about a half a foot of height to the forward breakfall: essentially it is forward flip from an altitude of six inches. Concentration should be focused on taking the breakfall as slowly as possible, and making as sharp a landing as possible. No run up to the prone student is needed nor is it desirable. This is a slow, static practice.

c. When a student can achieve a consistent landing on both sides, the "barrier" should be raised to level two, with the student providing the barrier crunched into a ball, chest pressed against the knees. The objective is the same as before, except the height has now been increased to a foot.

d. The student is now ready to try a flip in place. If further refinement of the forward breakfall is needed, the barrier approach can be stretched one step further, to the third level, ie. student on all fours.

e. To introduce the flip in place, students should pair up roughly according to height. The exercise goes as follows. From a static front stance, the student bends forward at the waist. With the rolling hand, she grasps her partner's corresponding arm in a lifesaving grab (each grabs the other's wrist with the hand), ie. for a right flip, the student is in right front stance, bent forward and grabbing her partner's right arm with her right arm. The partner stands in a deep horse stance to support her weight. Now, the student simply executes a forward breakfall without letting go of her partner. The important concept is to spin vertically in the air so that the legs pass cleanly over the head. The student lands in a side breakfall position, and the partner will help support her weight. Of particular importance is avoiding the desire to try to put the free hand down to roll over, ie. the one that's not holding onto the partner. This is the slapping hand. As the student enters the flip the slapping hand needs to be down near the thigh, not reaching forward. You don't flip because you choose not to put the free hand down; you flip because you must unwrap a joint that is in danger.
IMPORTANT: The partner assisting the student must be careful to protect his face and head. The feet of the student doing the flipping are going to pass very close to the partner's face at high speed. It's safer for the partner to pull the head back during the flip.

A very common error that may appear is the tendency to "pancake", or to let the shoulder opposite to the rolling arm roll outward so that the flip looks more like a flat spin in the horizontal plane. The student will also tend to land more on the back than in a good side breakfall position. Unfortunately, this seems to be largely a crisis in confidence. The student needs to focus on squaring the shoulders in the direction of the flip and taking the head straight underneath. Some general suggestions that are often made are:

(1) Tap tori's shoulder with the slapping hand just as you enter the flip. This forces you to keep your opposite shoulder forward.

(2) Track the ground between your feet with your eyes when you flip. You want to land exactly where your leading foot is.

f. When the preceding exercise is comfortable, the student should begin grabbing onto the two ends of her partner's belt instead of her partner's arm. The belt will still support her weight. The student should grab the belt as close to the knot as possible, of even hook the hand on the knot. The flip is identical. When that becomes comfortable the student can then begin taking a step forward, grabbing the belt and executing a flip. The emphasis should be on making the entry into the flip as smooth and automatic as possible: grab the belt, take the flip.

g. The next step is to begin taking ukemi from actual Aiki Jujitsu techniques. The general paradigm for executing a proper forward flip is to pull the body into the rolling (ie. "flipping") arm as tightly as possible, with the elbow joint in particular flexed in tightly, as one would do for a bicep curl. Equally important is that the shoulders be turned into the direction of the flip.

h. A static demonstration flip is actually much more difficult than receiving the technique from a throw. When a student is comfortable receiving the easier throws, such as inside arm twist and wrist twist, she can begin working on the demonstration flip. Essentially, the student starts in a front stance and then executes a flip in mid-air, just as if thrown by an invisible tori.

Testing Requirements (Right, Left)

a. Student begins in a formal stance.
b. No mental pause before the start of the breakfall
c. No use of the other arm during the breakfall, except to slap at the end. In particular,
d. The flip is vertical, with the legs passing vertically over the head. In particular, the flip
is not a "pancake", where the free shoulder rolls out and the student lands more on the
back than on the side.

e. Student lands on the side of the body, not the back.
f. Slapping arm is less than 90 degrees from the body.
g. Slap is correctly timed.
h. Legs finish in "figure 4" position, bent leg on the mat.

The following applications of the forward flip would be tested at various ranks: inside arm twist,
wrist twist, wrist guruma, ude tori—rear otoshi, barflex—rear otoshi, cross twist (sutemi) and
shito nage. The testing requirements are similar to the demonstration breakfall. Special attention
must be paid to how affectively the student protects the endangered joint by pulling the arm into
the center of the body and flexing the arm.

Like the foreward roll, many refinements can be made to the forward flip. Although they would
not be formally tested, students should be encouraged to experiment with the following exercises,
perhaps under supervision.

i. Make the flip quieter. Once you've perfected the ability to have everything impact the
mat simultaneously, try reaching backward with the slapping arm for the ground. It's
difficult to visualize, but what you are trying to do is have your arm ahead of your
body as you flip. Instead of slapping with the hand, use it as a shock absorber to
soften the impact on the mat. Excellent uke midoka can flip almost silently.

j. Make your head position totally irrelevant to the flip. Can you look any direction
while you flip? Can you close your eyes while you flip?

k. Make your stance irrelevant to the flip. As with the forward roll, this is the ultimate
objective and just as challenging to achieve. Here, you want to be able to take a flip
irrespective of your body's orientation to the technique being applied. When learning
the flip, you work on turning the far shoulder into the ukemi so your shoulders are
squared-up in the direction of the flip. Now you want to try to relax this requirement.
The key here is to picture yourself in the side breakfall position, in midair, as you
enter the flip. If you can get into that position the rest is easy—you just fall to the
ground. Ultimately, you will be doing half a cartwheel in midair!

To develop this "free" flip more formally, master the "free" roll first, i.e., a roll in which
the direction of your starting stance is irrelevant to the direction you roll in. Now,
simply follow the same exercises that go from forward roll to forward breakfall to
forward flip, but this time apply it at a ninety-degree angle. That is:

1. face north, take a "forward" breakfall due east, i.e., start in a front stance
   facing north, and finish in side breakfall position directed east

2. take the same breakfall over a prone student, i.e., the prone student will be
on your right, lying north-south
(3) take the same breakfall over a crouching student,
(4) take the same breakfall over a student on all fours, if necessary,
(5) take a flip grabbing a partner's arm, i.e. while facing your partner, grab his or her arm and enter a midair cartwheel. Your chest should be facing your partner's up until you enter the side breakfall position. Finally,
(6) take a flip grabbing a partner's belt.
V. Ukemi Charts

The two new charts are **Ukemi Demonstration** and **Ukemi Applications**. The testing requirements for each belt rank are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Belt Rank</th>
<th>Ukemi Demonstration</th>
<th>Ukemi Applications</th>
<th>Total Number of Falls for the Test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td># 1-2</td>
<td># 1</td>
<td>3 falls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green</td>
<td># 3-4</td>
<td># 1-4</td>
<td>8 falls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sankyu</td>
<td># 5</td>
<td># 1-5</td>
<td>6 falls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nikyu</td>
<td># 6</td>
<td># 6-11</td>
<td>8 falls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ikkyu</td>
<td># 7</td>
<td># 12-17</td>
<td>8 falls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shodan</td>
<td># 8</td>
<td># 18-24</td>
<td>9 falls</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The format of the applications chart is a throw followed by a breakfall. During the test, the student who is testing receives the technique, i.e. executes the appropriate breakfall, as performed by that student's uke for the test.
1. Back breakfall
2. Side breakfall (right, left)
3. Forward roll (right, left)
4. Forward breakfall (right, left)
5. Front breakfall
6. Barrier sutemi (right, left)
7. Bayonet sutemi (staff, knife)
8. Forward flip (right, left)

1. Osoto gari
2. Sukui nage
3. Ogoshi
4. Tani otoshi
5. Inside lift
6. Side thunderbolt
7. Tackle ouchi
8. Tomoe nage
9. Lightening throw
10. Inside armtwist
11. Wrist twist
12. Kane sute
13. Scissor rollup
14. Lapel guruma
15. Yoko guruma
16. Wrist guruma
17. Ude tori—rear otoshi
18. Kata guruma
19. Right blow, club yawara
20. Cross twist (to mat)
21. Right blow, tensho aiki
22. Barflex—rear otoshi
23. Cross twist (sutemi)
24. Shiho nage

Side breakfall
Side breakfall
Side breakfall
Side breakfall
Side breakfall
Side breakfall
Back breakfall
Forward roll
Forward breakfall
Forward flip
Forward flip
Back breakfall
Front breakfall
Forward roll
Forward roll
Forward flip
Forward flip
Front breakfall
Front breakfall
Forward roll
Forward flip
Front breakfall
Forward flip
Front breakfall
Forward flip
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<th>Proposed System</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>White Belt</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach back breakfall</td>
<td>No change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach side breakfall</td>
<td>No change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach reverse side breakfall</td>
<td>Teach as yoko guruma at nikiyu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach forward roll</td>
<td>Introduce forward roll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach forward breakfall</td>
<td>Introduce forward breakfall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Begin barrier sutemi - crouch</td>
<td>Postpone to yellow belt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eliminate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Yellow Belt</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach bayonet sutemi</td>
<td>Postpone to sankyu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Refine forward roll for testing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Refine forward breakfall for testing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Introduce barrier sutemi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Green Belt</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach front breakfall</td>
<td>No change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sankyu</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No ukemi curriculum</td>
<td>Teach forward flip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teach bayonet sutemi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Refine barrier sutemi for testing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nikyu</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No ukemi curriculum</td>
<td>Extend forward flip to wrist guruma, ude tori—r, ooshi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ikkyu</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No ukemi curriculum</td>
<td>Extend front breakfall to club yawara, cross twist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Extend f, flip to biflex—r, ooshi, cross twist, shiho nage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Refine forward roll for tensho aiki</td>
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