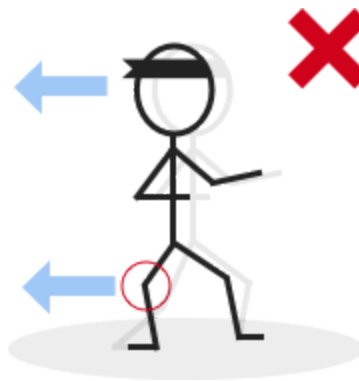


Effective Movement

While learning, Karate practitioners often struggle to develop fluid, efficient and effective movement, particularly when facing an opponent. Beginners, and even some more senior students may introduce unnecessary and counter-productive movements which can both slow the them down, and signal their intent to their opponent. These inefficiencies can be addressed with some simple guiding principles.

Moving Forward

When moving forward (attacking), practitioners should not include any backwards motion in their first movement. There is a tendency to bear weight on the rear leg in order to create force to propell the practitioner forwards, however this is an unnecessary and wasteful movement.



The practitioner loads the rear leg in an effort to create a forward motion with force.

This approach has several undesirable side-effects. The first movement undertaken by the practitioner in this example is a *backwards* movement. No matter how subtle, or rapid this movement may be, a well trained opponent will recognize this as the preparation for a forward motion and will thus expect the attack.

The second side-effect can often be that the practitioner rises as they move. This is because the loaded rear leg's most effective direction is in-fact not horizontal but diagonally upward which can lead to further wasted energy as the practitioner will not take the shortest path to the opponent. This can also lead to the practitioner *jumping* toward their opponent (a common error)



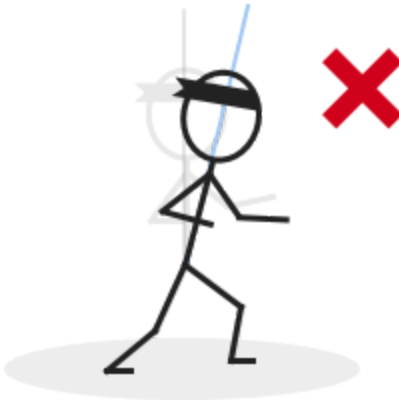
The practitioner *jumps* to their opponent.

The preferred approach is such that the first movement undertaken by the practitioner is a *forward* movement only. Do not load the rear leg to create potential energy as this will result in a *backwards* movement. Rather simply allow the front leg to bend forward using the force of gravity.



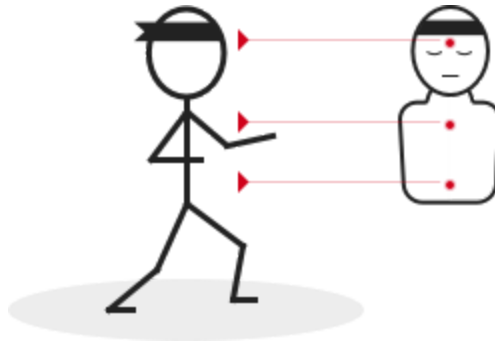
The practitioner allows the front leg to *collapse* in order to propel their body forward.

It can often be useful for students to consider what in their body is moving. The centerline of the body should have minimal angular movement when the practitioner is advancing. Beginners will often move their upper body first in an effort to close the distance to their opponent, however this merely creates an unbalanced position and doesn't affect the speed of their advance.



The practitioner bends and the waist in an effort to move faster.

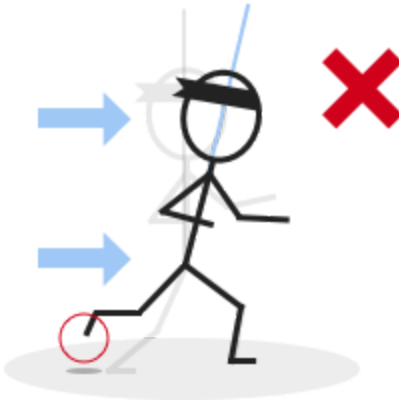
A technique to assist students in this endeavor is to bring focus to the concept of *tanden*. There are three *tanden* dominating the body's centerline. *Kami tanden* (between the eyes), *naka tanden* (in the chest) and *seika tanden* in the abdomen (this is sometimes referred to as *hara*, also *shimo tanden*). The practitioner should focus on moving these three points in the body in one forward motion. This will not only assist in maintaining a vertical centerline, but will also help prevent unnecessary backwards motion as the first instinct.



Imagine moving the tanden.

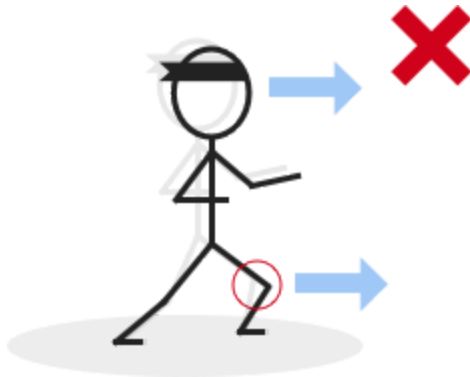
Moving Backward

Moving backward (defending) effectively, efficiently and with speed is often a difficult topic for students to master. The tendency, as with moving forward, is to either bear weight in the wrong direction, or to alter the centerline by bending and the waist (often coupled with lifting the rear leg). Altering the axis of the centerline by leaning forward is a common error demonstrated by beginners and stems from a desire to shift the center of gravity forward in order to raise the rear leg. This is inefficient for several reasons. The motion forward is counter-productive to the intent of moving backwards, and may signal your intent to your opponent. Secondly the alteration of the centerline and the raising of the rear leg creates an unstable, unbalanced position that is vulnerable.



The practitioner leans forward and raises the rear leg in an attempt to move backwards, but creates unbalanced forward motion.

A more subtle error is one in which the practitioner will slightly bear their weight onto the front leg in an attempt to *spring* backward. This will also cause a slight forward motion prior to moving backwards, and may also cause the practitioner to *jump* backwards.



The practitioner bears their weight forward and creates forward motion rather than backward.

The preferred approach is to *sink* into the rear leg and shift the center of gravity backwards along a horizontal line. This will allow the practitioner to move backward with minimal forward motion, and preserve the integrity of the centerline.



The practitioner *sinks* into the rear leg and moves backwards smoothly.

Turning

Changing direction, whether in the context of performing *kata*, or during combat training, is a crucial component to effective Karate and is also susceptible to several fundamental errors demonstrated by beginners. For the purposes of explanation, we will focus on one specific type of turn, the 270° turn, however the same principles can be applied to most situations in which a rapid turn movement is required.

A 270° turn is one in which the practitioner will rotate through 270° in order to arrive at a position at right angles to their starting point. An example of a 270° turn can be seen in the 10th movement of *Heian Shodan*.

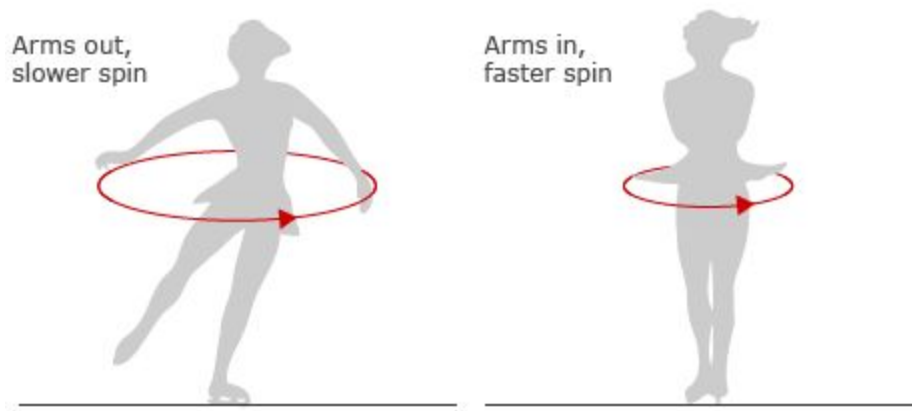
In turning movements such as this, a common error is to attempt to pivot on the *jiku ashi* (supporting leg) by leaning forward to balance the body over the leg.



The practitioner leans forward and lifts the rear leg to turn.

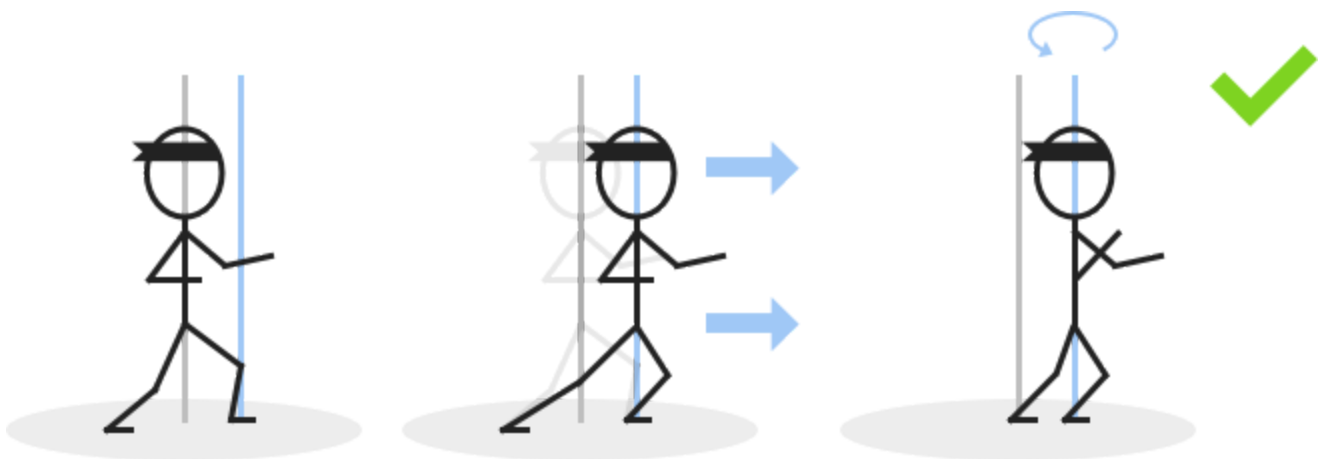
This is often done because the practitioner is trying to move their center of gravity and does so by re-distributing their body weight. Although this will indeed move the center of gravity toward the pivot point (the front leg in this example), it has the undesirable effect of creating an unbalanced position and is ultimately a slower movement.

Moving in a circle is faster the closer the mass of the body is to the pivot point. You can see this in movements like those found in figure skating:



The same is true for any circular motion. Thus the preferred approach is to first move the body toward the pivot point while maintaining the centerline.

Beginning in a position where the body's center of gravity is *behind* the pivot point, shift the weight forward until the center of the body's mass is as close as possible to the pivot point. As the next technique is prepared, contract the extremities (arms & legs) to and turn rapidly before expanding again into the next movement.



The practitioner simply shifts their body weight forward toward the pivot point and executes a tight turn.