



Session One Structure and Alignment

Taijiquan Core Principles are descriptions of the essential criteria for practice based on natural laws governing human structure, movement, and function. They are trainable concepts meant to be integrated into any and all *taijiquan* solo and partner practices. Core-principles exercises can be used in form-practice sessions as warmups or they can be trained independently. One's experience of the art is enhanced when one practices according to *taijiquan* core principles.

1. Joints and segments

In the beginning stages of skill acquisition a student learns basic choreographies but performs them inefficiently. To improve beyond a basic level, an understanding of how the various joints and segments of the body behave in support of gestures, stances, and postures is essential.

Joints

Movements made during *taijiquan* practice occur in large part through the articulation of eight moving joints; these are the ankles, knees, hips, and waist; and the wrists, elbows, shoulders, and neck. The joints can be grouped into pairs based on their type: the ankles-and-wrists 'gliding' joints; the knee-and-elbow 'hinge' joints; the hip-and-shoulder 'ball-and-socket' joints; and the waist-and-neck 'pivot' joints. The ankle, knee, hip, and waist form a 'gliding, hinge, ball-and-socket, and pivot' joint continuum in the lower body while the wrist, elbow, shoulder neck form another in the upper body. Core-principle based *taijiquan* respects the range and limitations of the joints by increasing awareness of where the joints are and how they express movement. Practitioners should understand how each joint naturally moves and explore the gestures in each form according natural-articulation principles.

Segments

The segments of the body are the relatively static sections on either side of the joints. These include: the foot, the lower leg, the upper leg, the pelvis, the torso; and the head, the hand, the forearm, and the upper arm. Recognizing the angle of placement of each body segment and the relationships between segments is fundamental to good *taijiquan* posture. The positioning of segments defines the appearance of *taijiquan*. It is important for practitioners to observe the angles and relative positions of the segments in *taijiquan* forms.

Blocks on springs

The body can be likened to an alternating series of blocks on springs—foot (block), ankle (spring), lower leg (block), knee (spring), upper leg (block), hip (spring), pelvis (block), waist (spring), torso (block), neck (spring), head (block); hand (block), wrist (spring), forearm (block), elbow (spring), upper arm (block), shoulder (spring). Each block is articulated by the spring attached to it and each spring is supported by the blocks on either side.



2. The Five Words of Self-composure

The 'five words of self-composure' — 'breath,' 'calm,' 'centre,' 'root' and 'energy' — interact with one another progressively in order to bring you into a state of physical and psychological preparation.

Breath ⇒ *Calm*

Conscious breathing soothes the system and brings about 'calm.'

Instruction: *Attend to each in and out breath and notice what changes take place inside. Let go of resistance and allow rigidity to disintegrate. Allow the breath to deepen, gradually bringing you to 'calm.'*

Calm ⇒ *Centre*

Calmness allows the musculature to settle and align with gravity thereby bringing it to its own 'centre.'

Instruction: *Let the body and heart-mind be calmed as your breath massages you from within. Allow what is held in to be let out. Notice the deep, soothing release as it brings you to your 'centre'.*

Centre ⇒ *Root*

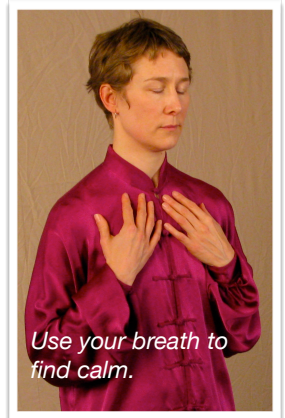
An aligned, centred body stands directly above the base of support causing a stronger connection with the ground or 'root.'

Instruction: *Let the centred weight of your own relaxing structure find its root in the base of support. Feel the centre become aroused and defined. Experience the secure, grounded stability that allows 'energy' to move.*

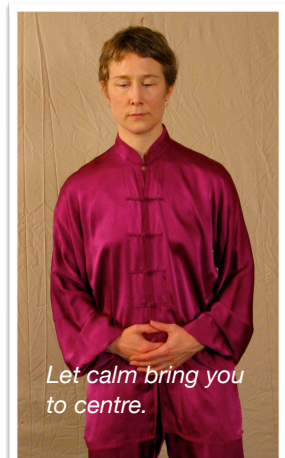
Root ⇒ *Energy*

A strong, rooted stance provides the foundation for movement and the release of 'energy.'

Instruction: *Follow the movement of energy as it is released. Let pulsation and rhythm find expression. As energy rises, encourage and guide it. Let the 'breath, calm, centre, root, energy' cycle continue.*



Use your breath to find calm.



Let calm bring you to centre.

Masich Internal Arts Registered Students

During these uncertain times, online interaction has become more important than ever before. Becoming a Masich Internal Arts Method 'Registered Student' can help keep you in touch and moving forward in your practice.

Should I become a MIAM Registered Student?

If half or most of your internal arts training is based on Masich Internal Arts Method curriculum, you could benefit from becoming a 'Registered Student.' The process is free-of-charge and there are no costs if you are accepted.

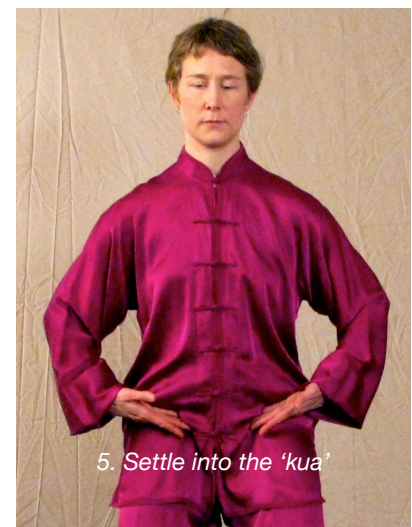
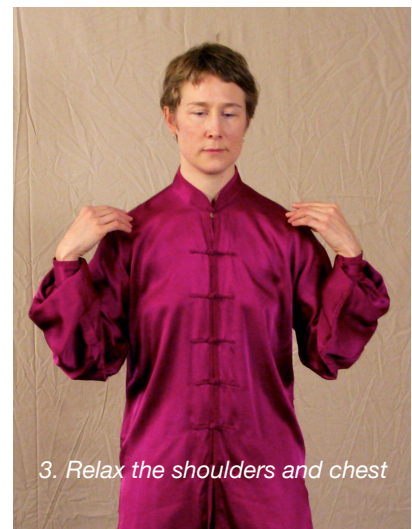
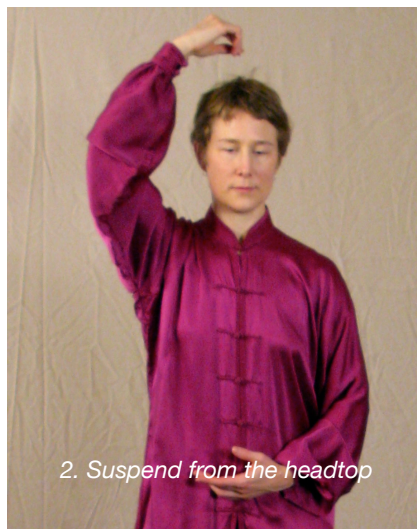
[Find out more here!](#)



3. How to stand

Standing correctly creates the foundation for moving correctly. One's outer structure and inner state affect one another reciprocally. A naturally aligned physical structure arises from an internal state of self-composure, and self-composure is greatly influenced by the situation of one's physical form. For example, if one's stance and posture do not accord with one's skeletal and muscular structure, one cannot 'feel at ease.' Similarly, if one is emotionally unsettled it is difficult to find dynamic alignment in the body.

1. With feet about shoulder-width apart, stand comfortably. Relax soles of the feet, ankles, knees, and hips.
2. Suspend from the headtop, allowing the neck to open.
3. Relax the shoulders and allow the chest to settle.
4. Loosen the lower back and waist.
5. Settle into the *kua*.

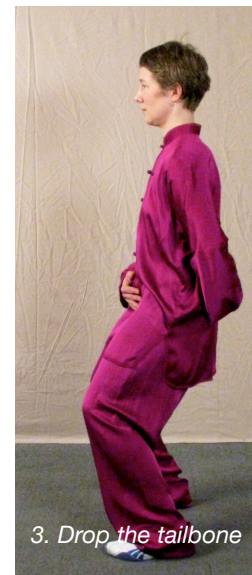


4. How to sink down and rise up

The simple acts of sinking into one's legs and rising back up to a standing position create the foundation for the many stances and transitions in *taijiquan*. Sinking down is not so much a matter of bending the knees but loosening the soles of the feet, ankles, knees, and hips to the point where gravity causes the relaxed joints to give way. As one relaxes the joints and allows gravity 'through the structure,' the joints begin to bend under influence of the downward force.

Sink down

1. While standing comfortably, deepen the relaxation in the soles of the feet, ankles, knees, and hips.
2. Let the *kua* fold paying specific attention to the proportionate release of *kua*, knees, and ankles.
3. Make sure the waist and lower back are relaxed with the tailbone dropping vertically as you sink down.



Rise up

1. Feel the relationship between your thighs and the 'ball-heel triangle' on the soles of each foot.
2. Press the thighs downward while maintaining relaxation in the soles of the feet, ankles, knees, and hips.
3. Continue the downward pressing action until fully standing. Maintain the knees in an unlocked position.
4. Check that the head is still suspended from the headtop.

