

Intermediate Positions for Hand Blocks¹

Introduction

This essay has the dual purpose of setting out the theory behind Intermediate Positions and providing a reference material for hand blocks, up to and including second dan techniques.

It is worth noting that as body types differ it is not possible to be absolute on every position and it can differ slightly depending on the individual. It is also important to realise that our technical understanding continues to evolve and while this is my current understanding as at April 2013 it is important to keep up to date with future clarifications from International Instructor Courses and updates from our Technical Advisor Group.

Why is an Essay on Intermediate Positions Important?

I consider there is a need to discuss and possibly codify the manner in which we transition between movements. I am hoping to provoke discussion particularly where other Taekwon-Doins consider I have incorrectly described an Intermediate Position. This discussion should lead to an improvement in our understanding in this area.

Currently, we rely upon our Instructors and the pictures and descriptions of chambering and intermediate positions from The Taekwon-Do Encyclopedia. The 15 Volume Encyclopedia of Taekwon-Do has in Volume 3 alone over 130 pages on hand defence techniques and while there are some very good explanations on inward versus outward blocks there is very little on chambering positions, crossings and trajectory. This is in contrast to the wealth of information available on where and how a technique ends meaning that a great deal has to be implied to ascertain how to arrive at the target in the appropriate way.

Without understanding how to move through the correct Intermediate Position it is unlikely the technique will be applied correctly as it will not come from the appropriate angle with the correct tool and maximum speed and power through utilisation of the entire body.

To correctly position yourself for the block you need to know the vertical position (e.g., shoulder line, chest line and solar plexus line), the horizontal position (e.g., chest, floating ribs), the manner in which the arms cross (e.g., blocking arm on top with back forearms together), and to apply it correctly you need to follow the correct trajectory to the target.

Confusing the matter further is that as different Taekwon-Do organisations have developed they have created slightly different interpretations of what is correct chambering and hence any non-standard references need to be treated with care. I will use our own organisation's chambering position e.g., for forearm low block "keep the forearms crossed in front of the opposite chest, placing the blocking one on the other".¹

¹ Special thanks to Master McPhail 8th dan, Master Bhana 7th dan and Mr Doogan 4th dan for sharing their knowledge, thoughts and material on Intermediate Positions. Any mistakes that remain are mine alone.

This is what we are familiar with and importantly is also what I consider to be the most technically correct position. For those interesting in exploring some of these other interpretations I suggest starting with Anslow (2010).ⁱⁱ

Possible Extensions of the Intermediate Position

Anslow (2006) states that “Chambering positions by and large play a big part of any application beyond basic blocking.”ⁱⁱⁱ Anslow (2012) further suggests that the chamber or intermediate position itself may be used to receive or intercept an attack with the remainder of the block being used as a follow through or counter attack such as locks and grabs to off balance the attacker which can be followed by breaks and more effective techniques.^{iv} This position is probably more extreme than the traditional ITF view on chambers. However, if we consider where and when General Choi started developing Taekwon-Do it does not seem so farfetched. General Choi studied Karate at Chuo University in Japan and this was an influence for Taekwon-Do.^v While it was only known as Karate to General Choi^{vi} we would recognise it now as Shotokan Karate.² Willoughby (2009) in an examination of Shotokan Karate reaches the following conclusions on the hand positions for blocking:

- “If we take a look at how blocks are performed, there is always a set-up movement where the hands are crossed in front of the body. This is the key, the set-up movement could actually be the block and then the blocking hand performs the counter. “
- “The draw hand can be used to grab the opponent and pull them off balance or pull them into your counter-attack. Also, by grabbing the opponent, it can present an opportunity to perform a throw or joint lock as a counter.”^{vii}

If you examine the Condensed Encyclopedia (Choi, 1991) you can also find reference to blocks being more than just defensive e.g., “The defence itself, however, carries out the attacking role at the same time.”^{viii} This is illustrated well with the double forearm block which shows where an upward, rather than a side, motion has caused the technique to fail to punch the target on the point of the chin.^{ix} This is a very aggressive defence.

Nonetheless even without adherence to these extensions of our usual view on blocks the arms need to be positioned and moved correctly to block effectively. If this also allows for further applications then that is an added benefit.

Movement

The Intermediate Position is not a static position that the arms move into and then remain in until the block is required. This assumption and behaviour is an unfortunate creation of the static nature of the way that Intermediate Positions are shown in the various photos that exist. The Intermediate Position is simply a transient point that you move through as part of the overall movement. This can be best explained through reference to the Training Secrets of Taekwon-Do below:^x

1. To study the theory of power thoroughly.
2. To understand the purpose and method of each movement clearly.

² This can be inferred by what type of Karate and where General Choi studied as explained in his memoirs, the on-line resources setting out where Shotokan Karate developed (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shotokan>) and the similarities in some of our techniques and “kata”. Anslow also makes reference to the influence of Karate on Taekwon-Do techniques including blocks.

3. To bring the action of eyes, hands, feet and breath into one single coordinated action.
4. To choose the appropriate attacking tool for each vital spot.
5. To become familiar with the correct angle and distance for attack and defence.
6. Keep both the arms and legs bent slightly while movement is in motion.
7. All movements must begin with a backward motion with very few exceptions. However, once the movement is in motion it should not be stopped before reaching the target.
8. To create a sine wave during the movement by utilizing the knee spring properly.
9. To exhale briefly at the moment of each blow except in a connecting motion.

Training Secret Number 7 is the most applicable since it states “...once the movement is in motion it should not be stopped before reaching the target.” Training Secret Number 3 also applies as if the arms stop at the Intermediate Position then it would not be a single co-ordinated action. Hence, moving to and then stopping at the Intermediate Position is clearly not working in accordance with General Choi Hong Hi’s Training Secrets and intent.

The Theory of Power

From the Theory of Power we know that speed is the key determinant of creating power.^{xi} The way in which this is applied in most blocking techniques is through a movement trajectory which follows a straight line.

Another component of the Theory of Power is reaction force. Maximising the power of the block requires making full use of the reaction hand e.g., “Pull the other fist to the hip while blocking.”^{xii} In some instances the reaction hand can provide defensive cover e.g., the reaction hand is brought in front of the shoulder for a walking stance reverse knifehand low inward block so that it covers the ... abdomen.^{xiii} In other instances the reaction hand allows you to maintain balance and equilibrium e.g., the knifehand inward strike in Won-Hyo is balanced with the reaction hand moving towards the opposite shoulder. Interestingly, this particular reaction hand movement ends up providing cover and could also be performing a grab and pull at the same time.

While all elements of the Theory of Power are relevant the last I will single out is Concentration.^{xiv} In particular, the hip needs to rotate in the same direction as the hands to fully mobilise the hip muscles.

The “Secret” Principle

The “secret” principle is the revolving principle e.g., with respect to the forearm low block “the reason for keeping the back forearms crossed at the start of blocking is to observe the revolving principle.”^{xv} I have always been taught this as “everything must twist”.³ Checking that the blocking arms rotate as they move towards the end of their movement is a way of self-testing that you have the intermediate position and crossings set up correctly.⁴ The revolving principle is implied in the Condensed Encyclopedia (1991) rather than being explicitly stated e.g., “Blocking tools reach the targets without revolving, thus lacking the necessary force”.^{xvi}

³ Please note that as you progress there will be some exceptions particularly with cross-cut techniques.

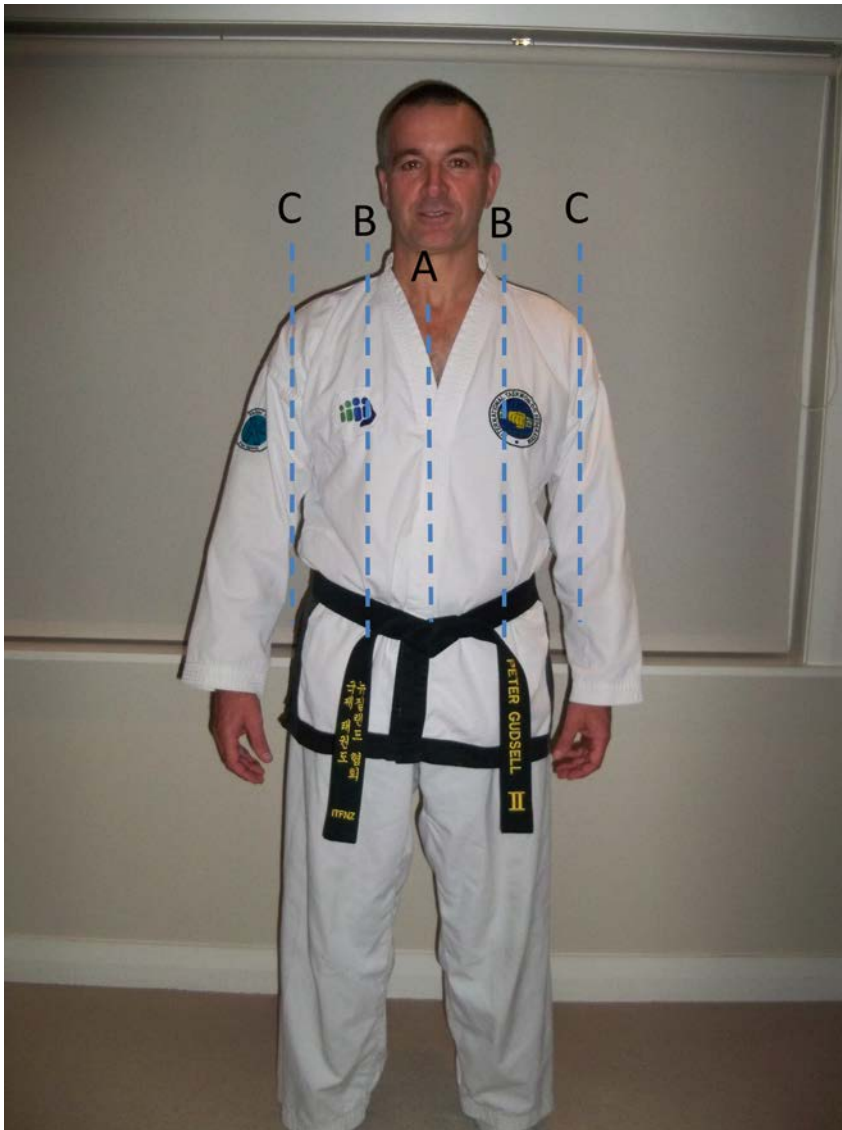
⁴ Some common mistakes are set out in Appendix II.

Chamber Points

As mentioned earlier you need to know the vertical and horizontal positions of the body to correctly position your arms for the Intermediate Position. As a general rule you cross at the side to block to the front and conversely you cross at the front when blocking to the side.^{xvii} The vertical positions are shown in Diagram 1 below and consist of:

- A. the solar plexus or centre line,
- B. the chest line, and
- C. the shoulder line.

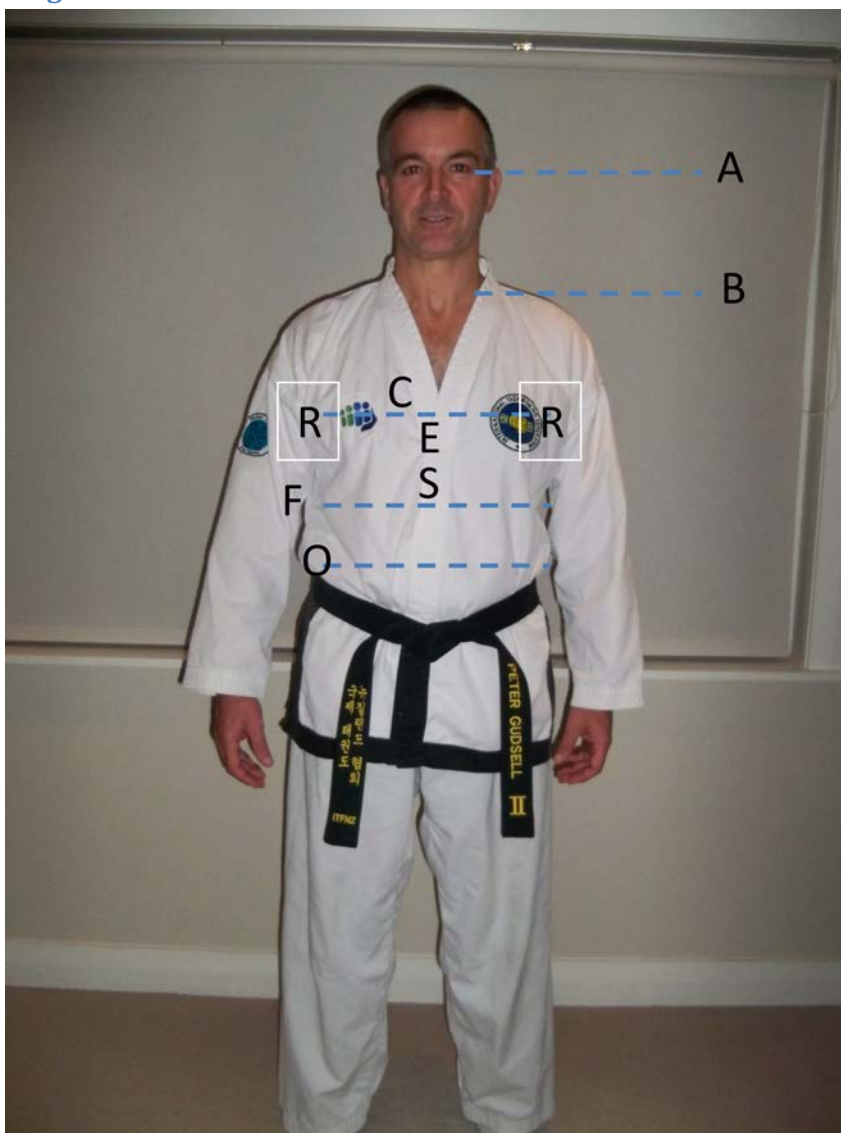
Diagram 1: Vertical Chamber Positions



The horizontal positions are shown in Diagram 2 below and consist of:

- A. eye height,
- B. shoulder height,
- C. chest height,
- E. epigastrium (a position rather than a height),
- S. Solar plexus (a position rather than a height),
- R. Ribcage Position – same height as the chest line but on the far side of the chest line,
- F. Floating ribs, and
- O. Abdomen (lower).

Diagram 2: Vertical Chamber Positions



Crossing Positions

Once the chambering position has been determined then the crossing can be applied. Diagrams 3-5 below give three common crossing examples to help in the use of the reference table in Appendix I. The view point is from above the defenders head so the diagrams show your arms as you would expect to see them.

Diagram 3: An example showing both back fists facing upwards



Diagram 4: Example showing the back forearms being together



Diagram 5: Example showing both back fists facing forward



It is worth reiterating that as, set out in the Training Secrets, with all of our Taekwon-Do techniques the trajectory and crossing works when we understand the purpose of the technique. A simple example of this is considering the application of a forearm low block compared with a knifehand low block. In this comparison the forearm low block arms cross in the same way as a knifehand low block, except at a different horizontal position. This is because they have different purposes and targets so they approach from a different angle. Specifically, the forearm low block is travelling in a more downward trajectory to attack the tibia whereas the knifehand low block is approaching more from the side as it is attacking the inner or outer tibia.

After the crossings and chamber points are embedded for the first blocks further progression becomes easier as you can build on what you already know. Using the above example you can explain the chambering and crossing for the knifehand low block as being “like for the forearm low block but across at the ribcage rather than on the opposite chest.”

Conclusion

To apply hand blocks in the manner intended by General Choi we need to move through the Intermediate Position with our arms correctly positioned and follow the correct trajectory to the intended target area. Through my search of the literature, discussions with seniors, and production of the reference section which follows I hope to have produced an easy to follow set of instructions

for students. At the same time I look forward to the ensuing discussion on some of the more ambiguous crossings as it will help improve our understanding in this area.

Appendix I: Intermediate Position Reference Table

Technique ^{xviii}	Grade	Chamber Point	Crossing position of blocking arm or intermediate position	Motion or trajectory (assume rotation applies unless otherwise stated)
Forearm low block	10 th Gup	Opposite chest	On top of the other with back forearms together as shown in Diagram 4	A straight line from the chambering position to attack the top of the opponents tool e.g., tibia ^{xix}
Knifehand low block	10 th Gup	In front of the opposite ribcage ^{xx}	On top of the other with back forearms together	A straight line from the chambering position to attack the side of the opponents tool e.g., inner or outer tibia ^{xxi}
Inner forearm block	10 th Gup	Opposite chest	Under the other with both back fists facing upward as shown in Diagram 3 ^{xxii}	A straight line from an inward to an outward trajectory – an outward block ^{xxiii}
Outer forearm inward block	9 th Gup	n/a	Keep both back fists faced upward ^{xxiv}	A straight line from an outward to inward trajectory to the chest line ^{xxv}
Forearm guarding block	9 th Gup	Bring the blocking hand in front of the opposite shoulder while raising the other hand to eye height ^{xxvi} Do not over-extend the arms or clench the fist too tightly or you greatly reduce speed. ^{xxvii}	Front hand is palm up and back hand is palm down	Straight line

Technique	Grade	Chamber Point	Crossing position of blocking arm or intermediate position	Motion or trajectory (assume rotation applies unless otherwise stated)
Forearm rising block	8 th Gup	In front of the opposite side floating ribs ^{xxviii}	On top of the other with back forearms together	Straight line
Outer forearm side block	8 th Gup	Opposite chest	On top of the other with back forearms together ^{xxix}	Straight line
Knifehand side block	8 th Gup	Opposite chest	On top with back forearms together ^{xxx}	Straight line
Twin forearm block	8 th Gup	Same side chest	Front hand is inside the other (as it is the primary block) with both back fists facing forward as shown in Diagram 5 ^{xxxi}	Straight lines
Knifehand guarding block	8 th Gup	As for the forearm guarding block - both arms move backwards with the back hand at eye height and the front hand in front of the opposite shoulder	Front hand is palm up and back hand is palm down	Straight lines to cause pain or circular motion to push. ^{xxxii}
Outer forearm wedging block	7 th Gup	Solar plexus	Both back fists facing the opponent (if moving then front hand matches the leg that will end in front) ^{xxxiii}	Straight lines
Palm downward block	7 th Gup	n/a	n/a	Blocking tool reaches the target in a circular motion ^{xxxiv}
Inner forearm circular block	6 th Gup	Lower abdomen	Palms faced downward with the blocking hand underneath ^{xxxv}	The blocking tool should reach the attacking foot in a large circular motion to enable the blocking hand to scoop the foot. ^{xxxvi}

Technique	Grade	Chamber Point	Crossing position of blocking arm or intermediate position	Motion or trajectory (assume rotation applies unless otherwise stated)
Twin knifehand block	5 th Gup	Same side chest	Front hand is inside the other (as it is the primary block) with both back fists facing forward ^{xxxvii}	Straight lines
Double forearm block	5 th Gup	Both arms move backwards with the back arm fist at shoulder height and the front arm lower	Both backfists facing up (palms down) ^{xxxviii}	Described as a side motion ^{xxxix}
Palm hooking block	5 th Gup	Opposite ribcage	A half cross with the blocking arm on top of the other with backfist facing opponent. Bottom arm has palm facing down ^{xl}	A passing through motion and then the blocking tool must reach the target in an arc so it can be placed on the back forearm ^{xli}
Reverse knifehand side block	4 th Gup	Opposite chest	Under the other with both back fists facing upward	Straight line
Palm upward block	4 th Gup	n/a	Both palms face downward ^{xlii}	Blocking point reaches the target in a circular motion ^{xliii}
X-fist rising block	4 th Gup	Solar plexus and rise with the forearms crossed above the centre of the forehead at the moment of the block ⁵	Palms facing each other	Rising in a straight line after crossing at the solar plexus
Palm pressing block	4 th Gup	n/a	Always accompanied by a palm upward block ^{xliiv} Palm pressing faces down and palm upward faces upward	Straight lines without rotation

⁵ This is a contentious one as the 1991 Condensed Encyclopedia (P 219) states “the wrists must be crossed in the centre of the forehead at the moment of the block.” However, I have described it as I have been taught and understand the technique and look forward to the debate.

Technique	Grade	Chamber Point	Crossing position of blocking arm or intermediate position	Motion or trajectory (assume rotation applies unless otherwise stated)
U-shape block	4 th Gup	Within the movement the hands need to be orientated correctly once they are at the side rear	Starting with both palms faced upwards ^{xlv} on the side that will be blocked	Begin on the side that will be blocked then circle to the back and load at the side rear before moving to the target in a straight line
X-fist pressing block	3 rd Gup	Solar plexus	Hands (lightly clenched) extend to eye height at the sides with palms facing the opponent. ^{xlvi} On completion the bottom fist matches the forward leg e.g., if right walking stance then the bottom fist is the right fist.	After crossing press down in a straight line
W-shape block	3 rd Gup	n/a	n/a	An arc following the movement of the hips
Double forearm low pushing block	3 rd Gup	n/a	Both palms facing downwards	Side motion
Knifehand low guarding block	3 rd Gup	Bring the blocking hand in front of the opposite shoulder while raising the other hand to eye height	Front hand is palm up and back hand is palm down	Straight line to cause pain or circular motion to push. ^{xlvii}
Palm pushing block	2 nd Gup	n/a	Execute as for a punch with hand on hip having palm facing up	Straight line

Technique	Grade	Chamber Point	Crossing position of blocking arm or intermediate position	Motion or trajectory (assume rotation applies unless otherwise stated)
Side front block	2 nd Gup	Solar plexus/ epigastrium	Blocking hand underneath backfists facing up ^{xlviii}	Straight line
X-knifehand checking block	1 st Gup	n/a	Both palms face toward each other ^{xlix}	Straight with no rotation
Twin palm upward block	1 st Gup	n/a	Both palms faced downwards	The blocking tools reach the targets in a circular motion ^l
Double arc hand block	1 st Dan	n/a	Both palms facing the defender ^{li}	The blocking tools should reach the target in a straight line ^{lii}
Forefist pressing block	1 st Dan	n/a	Always accompanied by a side front block with the opposite inner forearm for sitting and diagonal stance ^{liii}	Straight line
Inner forearm wedging block	1 st Dan	Crossed in front of the solar plexus ^{liv}	Palms facing the opponent	Straight line
Low front block	1 st Dan	n/a	Palms facing the opponent	Straight line
Low reverse block	1 st Dan (NB: in Kwang-Gae this block is coming directly from a double forearm block rather than chambering)	Opposite chest	On top of the other with back fists together	A straight line from the chambering position to attack the top of the opponents tool e.g., tibia ^{lv}
Nine (9) shape block	1 st Dan	n/a	Back fists facing the opponent	The lower arm reaches the target in an arc motion while the other arm must reach in a straight line. ^{lvi}

Technique	Grade	Chamber Point	Crossing position of blocking arm or intermediate position	Motion or trajectory (assume rotation applies unless otherwise stated)
Reverse knifehand low guarding block	1 st Dan	Bring the blocking hand in front of the opposite shoulder while raising the other hand to eye height	Both palms faced downward ^{lvii}	Straight line to cause pain or circular motion to push. ^{lviii}
Scooping block	1 st Dan	n/a	Both palms begin facing down	Must always be exercised in a continuous motion ^{lix} Blocking tool should reach the target in a large circular motion while bending the body downward at the start of the motion. ^{lx}
U-shaped grasp	1 st Dan	n/a	Starting with both palms faced upwards on the side that will be blocked	Begin on the side that will be blocked then circle to the back before moving to the block in a straight line
Alternate palm downward block	2 nd Dan	n/a	No crossing - Arms slightly wider than shoulder width with palms facing each other ^{lxi}	Straight line ^{lxii6}
Downward block (with outer forearm)	2 nd Dan	n/a	Both palms facing down with arms naturally wider than shoulders and blocking arm hand at eye height ^{lxiii}	Straight line

⁶ This conclusion is reached through studying all of the Downward Blocks in Volume 3 (Choi, 2008, PP 247-256) and noting that only the palm downward block is described as reaching the target in a circular motion.

Technique	Grade	Chamber Point	Crossing position of blocking arm or intermediate position	Motion or trajectory (assume rotation applies unless otherwise stated)
Knifehand rising block	2 nd Dan	In front of the opposite side floating ribs (as for the forearm) ^{lxiv} (except where body facing is already full facing where you cross on the solar plexus line e.g., Eui-Am ^{lxv})	On top of the other with back forearms together	Straight line
Reverse knifehand low inward block	2 nd Dan	n/a	Both palms faced downwards. ^{lxvi} ^{lxvii} Opposite side fist in front of the shoulder	Straight line
Parallel block	2 nd Dan	Epigastrium/ solar plexus	Both back fists half facing the front ^{lxviii}	Straight line
Reverse knifehand circular block	2 nd Dan	Lower abdomen	Backfists faced upwards with the blocking hand underneath	The blocking tool should reach the attacking foot in a large circular motion to enable the blocking hand to scoop the foot. ^{lxix}
Twin palm pressing block	2 nd Dan	n/a	Palms facing down from shoulder height ^{lxx}	Straight line
Twin palm rising block	2 nd Dan	n/a	Palms facing each other naturally wider than shoulders and around shoulder height ^{lxxi}	Straight line
X-fist downward block	2 nd Dan	Solar plexus	Keep both palms faced downwards ^{lxxii}	Straight Line

Technique	Grade	Chamber Point	Crossing position of blocking arm or intermediate position	Motion or trajectory (assume rotation applies unless otherwise stated)
Forearm obverse low block (primary) with inner forearm middle side block (secondary)	2 nd Dan (Kodang)	Opposite chest	On top of the other with back forearms together. Always accompany with an inner forearm middle side block ^{lxxiii}	Straight line

Appendix II: Common Mistakes

From my review of the literature I have recorded a number of common mistakes which for completeness I have set out below. By being aware of these errors and following the above outline and references these mistakes should be avoidable:

- Bend of the elbow e.g., if the elbows are raised rather than naturally down by your sides when crossing you expose your armpit and ribs to the opponent. Also if at the end of the block the elbow is locked out then it can be broken as it has lost flexibility.^{lxxiv}
- Fist too tightly clenched or wrists bent in moving between positions when they should be lightly clenched and relaxed with the wrists straight. Also if the technique ends as a knifehand it doesn't travel through the motion as a knifehand.
- Facings being incorrect. Most blocks are half facing for one handed blocks (excepting rising and front blocks). If incorrectly full facing with blocks then the lower abdomen can be attacked.^{lxxv}
- Over-rotating backwards, as your hips will then not be moving in a single co-ordinated movement.
- Side blocks ending outside the shoulder line when they should be focused "toward the centre of the defender's shoulders."^{lxxvi}
- The arms staying static once they reach the intermediate position - it is a point that is moved through as part of (usually) a backwards motion.

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End Notes

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- ^{xl} Choi, Hong Hi. (2008). *Taekwon-Do. The Korean art of self-defence. (15 Volumes). Eighth edition. Volume 12.* P 259.
- ^{xli} Choi, Hong Hi. (1991). *Taekwon-Do. The Korean art of self-defence. Second Edition.* P 227.
- ^{xlii} Choi, Hong Hi. (1965). *Taekwon-Do. The Korean art of self-defence.* Daeha Publication Company, Seoul, Korea. P 161.
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- ^{xliv} Choi, Hong Hi. (1991). *Taekwon-Do. The Korean art of self-defence. Second Edition.* P 225.
- ^{xlv} Choi, Hong Hi. (2008). *Taekwon-Do. The Korean art of self-defence. (15 Volumes). Eighth edition. Volume 6.* P 307.
- ^{xlvi} Choi, Hong Hi. (1991). *Taekwon-Do. The Korean art of self-defence. Second Edition.* P 226.
- ^{xlvii} Choi, Hong Hi. (1991). *Taekwon-Do. The Korean art of self-defence. Second Edition.* P 236.
- ^{xlviii} Choi, Hong Hi. (2008). *Taekwon-Do. The Korean art of self-defence. (15 Volumes). Eighth edition. Volume 12.* P 129. Page 129 shows the first move of Choong-Jang while page 131 shows move 2 and has different crossing. In my opinion it is move 2 that is shown incorrectly. Movement 29 of Hwa-Rang shown in Volume 10 (P 181) supports the view that the blocking hand comes from underneath.
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- ^{lxii} Choi, Hong Hi. (2008). *Taekwon-Do. The Korean art of self-defence. (15 Volumes). Eighth edition. Volume 3.* P 250.
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- ^{lxxiii} Choi, Hong Hi. (2008). *Taekwon-Do. The Korean art of self-defence. (15 Volumes). Eighth edition. Volume 12.* P 325.
- ^{lxxiv} Choi, Hong Hi. (2008). *Taekwon-Do. The Korean art of self-defence. (15 Volumes). Eighth edition. Volume 8.* P 183.
- ^{lxxv} Choi, Hong Hi. (2008). *Taekwon-Do. The Korean art of self-defence. (15 Volumes). Eighth edition. Volume 12.* PP 33 & 59.
- ^{lxxvi} Choi, Hong Hi. (2008). *Taekwon-Do. The Korean art of self-defence. (15 Volumes). Eighth edition. Volume 12.* P 23.
- ^{lxxvii} Choi, Hong Hi. (2008). *Taekwon-Do. The Korean art of self-defence. (15 Volumes). Eighth edition. Volume 12.* PP 83 & 93. Page 83 mentions the side fists facing down for the reverse knifehand variant but this is contradicted for the same move on P 93. I have gone with palms facing down as the correct version as it feels like a more natural Intermediate Position for my body type.
- ^{lxxviii} Choi, Hong Hi. (2008). *Taekwon-Do. The Korean art of self-defence. (15 Volumes). Eighth edition. Volume 7.* P 157.
- ^{lxxix} Choi, Hong Hi. (1991). *Taekwon-Do. The Korean art of self-defence. Second Edition.* P 239.
- ^{lxxx} Choi, Hong Hi. (2008). *Taekwon-Do. The Korean art of self-defence. (15 Volumes). Eighth edition. Volume 12.* P 175.
- ^{lxxxi} Choi, Hong Hi. (2008). *Taekwon-Do. The Korean art of self-defence. (15 Volumes). Eighth edition. Volume 12.* P 331.
- ^{lxxxii} Choi, Hong Hi. (2008). *Taekwon-Do. The Korean art of self-defence. (15 Volumes). Eighth edition. Volume 12.* P 57.
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