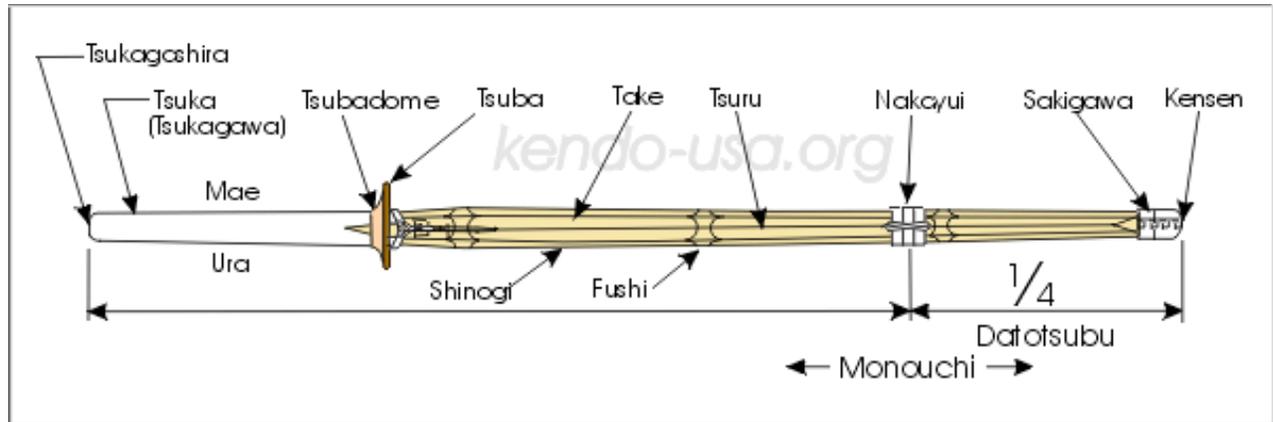


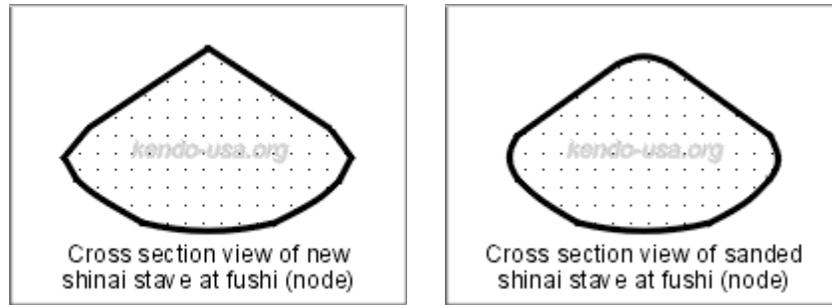
The Shinai & Shinai Maintenance



Disassembly of the shinai is simple. First untie the tsuru at the handle and then all the pieces should slip off. I say here that they should slip off. A properly tied nakayui will be tight against the take and difficult to slip over the node. You will have to work it over the node. It will probably loosen up and necessitate retying it anyway. Removing the handle can be a chore as well. Some shinai handles are put on using a machine, which grasps the handle and pulls/pushes it on. If the handle is undersize then it takes a lot of work to get it off. You have to work it down from the opening a little at a time until it will slide off. Push downward on it to make a wrinkle and then work the wrinkle down towards the end and so on.

As a rule once the handle is removed the bamboo will not fall apart on a new shinai. Some have the staves glued together at the handle and you will have to peel them apart carefully so the staves will not be damaged. Also the chigiri, the little metal square in the handle helps to hold the take together. Be sure to not lose the chigiri. It keeps the handle aligned and prevents it from collapsing. Once apart, lay the staves out in order and number them if they are not numbered already so they can be put back together in the right order.

The edge of new shinai staves come to a point from the being planed and fitted together. You want to round this over so it will reduce the chance of the bamboo fraying and splintering during use. On the inside of the node it comes to a point also. You may prefer to round this slightly as well to allow the bamboo to move. If you round the nodes down completely then you remove a bearing surface for the bamboo staves to move against each other and distribute the force of the strike.



There are several tools available for working on the shinai. Different grades of sandpaper will generally do the job just as well and you do not have to worry about accidentally cutting or gouging the stave.

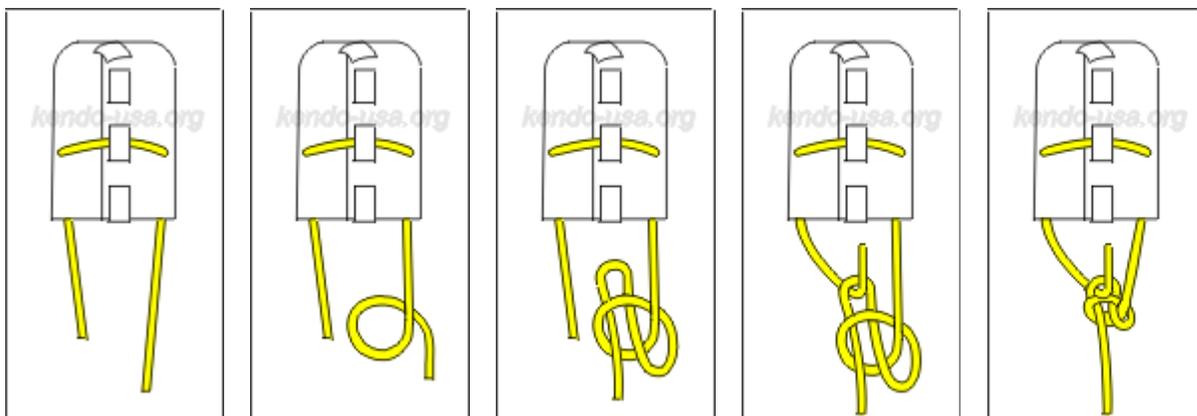
Once sanding is complete the staves must be lubricated in some way. Use a light oil or wax. This is a personal preference. Both will allow the bamboo staves to move against each other. The oil will give the bamboo greater longevity. You can purchase a spray can of oil from many kendo stores for this purpose or use a light mineral or vegetable oil. Spray the oil directly onto the back of the stave or on a cloth and rub it into the back and sides. The staves can also be soaked in a tube made from plastic pipe. Linseed oil works well but will add weight and may change the balance of the shinai. The spray can is easiest. One opinion is to let it the oil soak in for 3 days before using the shinai. I'm too lazy to do this.

After oiling, reassemble the shinai and you're ready for your first strike.

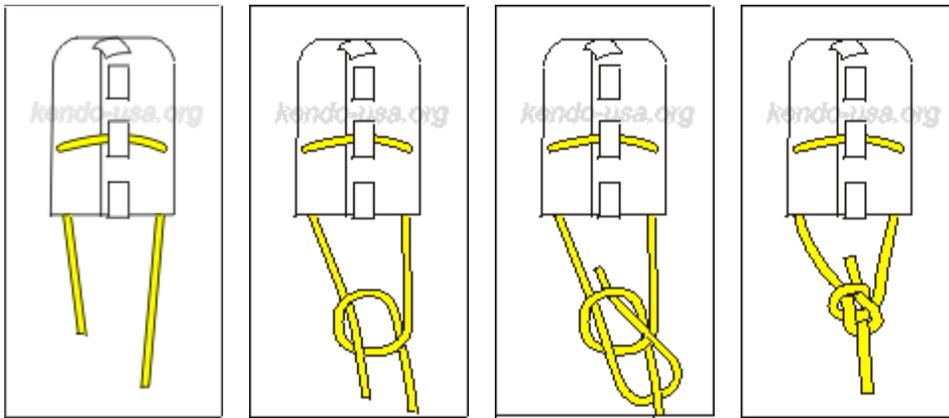
Assembling the Shinai

Here are two of several methods for tying the knot for the sakigawa. The first is a slip knot so it is important to tighten it well and make sure the tsuru is tied to the correct tension on the shinai.

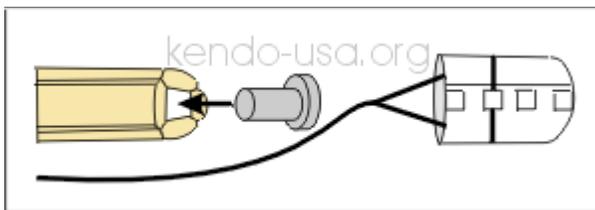
Tying the Sakigawa



Tying the Sakigawa - Method 2

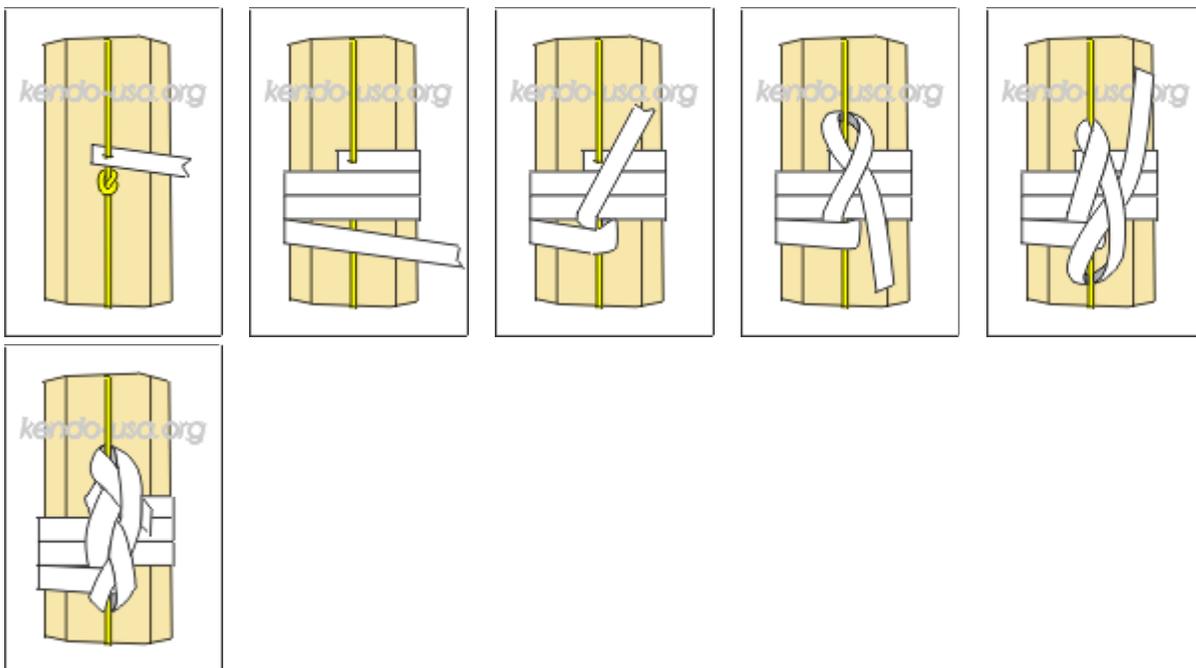


Insert the Sakigomu

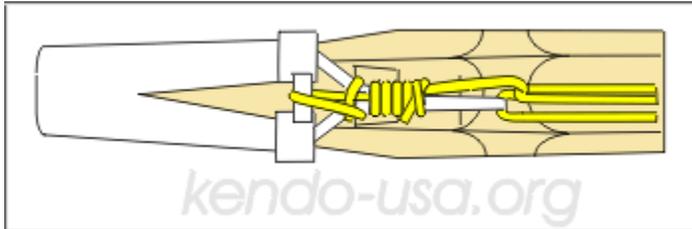
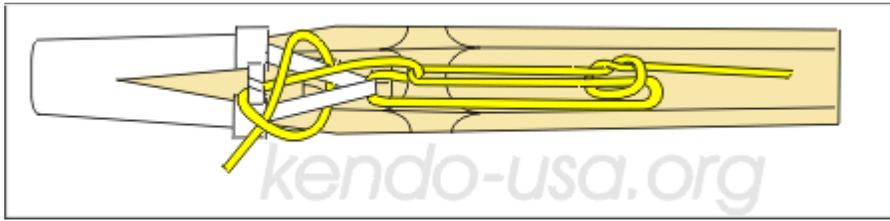


Select the right size sakigomu for the shinai you are using. The sakigawa should fit tightly on the end and not twist during use. It must also be of minimum length as per the shinai regulations to prevent it from coming off during practice.

Tying the Nakayui



Tying the Tsuru



Tsuru Tension

When you tie the tsuru how tight is tight enough. The shinai flexes a lot during a strike. Too loose and the sakigawa can pop off creating a danger. An over tightened tsuru can cause the shinai to start to curve. When you lift the tsuru away from the shinai between the handle and the nakayui, there should be no more than two fingers width of space. One to one and a half fingers width is best.

Maintaining Your Shinai

It is important to continually check your shinai for any problems that might occur. The shinai should be checked every practice for cracks, fraying or splinters. The tension of the tsuru should also be checked. A tsuru that is loose can allow the sakigawa to come off during practice. If a sakigawa comes off it can allow the staves to enter through the men gane causing injury. The sakigawa should be checked for wear on the bottom and the lacing on the end for signs of opening up. The shinai must be repaired before being used again. New shinai should be checked after first use to ensure that nothing has stretched and loosened up such as the tsuru.

Replacing a Broken Stave

There are a variety of opinions about replacing staves and rotating them. Ask three people and get four opinions. I change out my staves and rotate them as well and have found no difference in the how long the shinai lasts. They run from breaking the first time you use them to lasting up to two years. Some bamboo is just better than other.

To replace the stave line it up with the ends of the shinai and press it against the chigiri (metal square) to make a mark. Cut in the new groove. Be sure and select a replacement stave that matches as closely as possible to the shinai you are repairing. It should match for size and width.