

Sarah Mauney

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Sample Syllabus

The Alexander Technique For Graduate Theater & Dance Students

What is the Alexander Technique?

- The Alexander Technique is a method of body re-education and is one of the most effective somatic techniques for restoring our bodies' natural balance and efficiency.
- The Alexander Technique asks us to become aware of how we use ourselves habitually, and recognize that most of us do not use ourselves very efficiently. We all have a tendency to over-effort in even simple activities and when this over-use of muscles becomes habitual it can stop us from achieving desired outcomes.
- The Alexander Technique utilizes the relationship of the head, neck, and spine as well as the pelvis the organizing relationship for the rest of the body, as well as consciously using the psychosomatic (mind/body connectivity) nature of human beings to create lasting change in the individual students.

Goals

- Notice and stop harmful habitual movement patterns in the self and in larger social systems.
- Develop improved use through the study of Alexander's Main Principles of Inhibition, Direction, and Conscious Choice making.
- To apply the AT principles to specialized areas such as dancing, acting, singing, and sports.
- To apply the AT principles to everyday situations.
- To apply the AT principles to anti-racist work and allyship.
- Increase observational skills as teachers.
- Learn to take care of yourself, mind and body.
- Deepen awareness of the Anatomy of the Body and of good use/ clarify and refine individual body maps to reflect deepened anatomical understanding.

Resources

- "Alexander Technique: A Skill for Life" by Pedro de Alcantara
- "The Evolution of Movement" by Robin Simmons
- Chapters from "My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Our Bodies" by Resmaa Menakem
- Chapters from "How to Be An Anti-Racist" by Ibram X. Kendi
- Podcasts episodes from '10 Percent Happier' "Embodied" and "Tara Brach".

Assignments and Grading Criteria

- Attendance and Participation (20%)
 - As Alexander Technique is an embodied practice learning in action is the best way to experience our habits and learn to let go of those which do not serve our end goals. Students are invited to participate in each activity with the fullest curiosity and attention and engage in all class discussions.
- Active Rest Journal (15%)
 - The Active Rest Journal will serve as documentation of the student's practices and applications of AT outside the classroom. Students will be encouraged to pay attention to everyday situations where habitual movement patterns arise and report back on what they noticed and how they chose to handle that situation. Journals will be checked at mid-term and end of the term.
- Goals & Intentions Paper (1) (5%)
 - A short summary of what each student hopes to gain from the class.
- Self Reflection Analysis (2) (15%)
 - To be turned in Week 6 and Week 14, each paper will serve as an opportunity for the students to synthesize readings, in-class and extra-curricular experiences as they relate to their own journey of discovering and changing habits.
- Salon Participation (5%)
 - The Salons will serve as 20-minute, one-on-one coaching sessions where each student will perform a dance phrase, scene or song and then receive some hands-on (COVID permitting) coaching while they perform their chosen skill again. These sessions will be observed by the class for their own education and to sharpen their teaching/observation skills, but classmates will not be invited to offer critiques of performance.
- Private Lessons/observations (14) (25%)
 - These lessons will introduce individual students to specific movement experiences and ways to use their environments to provide sensory feedback in order to further their learning of their specific movement habits and learn greater efficiency of moving. One-on-one via Zoom or in person, depending on pandemic conditions.
- Final Project (15%): Students will be invited to synthesize and reflect back on the most important or profoundly changing principles or experiences from the class in a creative way. It is up to each student to decide if they want to submit their final project as performance, visual art piece, traditional paper, or any other form they can think of, pending instructor approval.

Who?

- Dance & Theater Graduate and Undergraduate Students (or anyone with a body)
- Individuals with a lot of body knowledge but who may not recognize their own poor use when applied to their chosen performing art.
- Folks who may have had some introduction to AT but no in-depth study
- Students with other somatics backgrounds/knowledge
- People who have had professional careers and who are ready to move their abilities to a high level of understanding.

What?

- The Alexander Technique, utilizing FM Alexander's methodology in creating the technique as a means for self-discovery for each student.
- The Principles of AT including Inhibition, the Directions, Primary Control, Breath Support
- Dart Procedures, which utilize many principles of the Alexander Technique in conjunction with developmental movement patterns in order to give participants new access to their own use.

When?

- In a group class meeting once a week for 14 weeks, and in a 30-minute private lesson every week, alternating observation/receiving work

Where?

- University of Colorado, Boulder

Why?

- Because dancing and acting well do not equate balanced, efficient use of the body
- Because professionals in the performing arts have a specific and vested interest in making sure that their physical use and expression is clear & intentional.
- Because Conscious Control of the body allows us to make choices.
- Because when we are feeling good in our bodies, our minds feel good, too.

How?

*Using the readings by Resmaa Menakem, all following methodologies will be guided by the question and principles- "Is this work truly freeing to everyone, or is it another method for colonizing non-white bodies?" and "in all our work, let us consider racism and white supremacy as a habit, conscious or otherwise, we all embody"

- Methodologies will include-
 - One-on-one lessons conducted via Zoom where the instructor will lead students through guided experiences designed to bring awareness to the individual's unique set of habits.
 - Time spent in Constructive Rest Position in order to learn and experience the idea of "un-doing" or do-ing less when at rest and to rest and reset the main postural muscles of the spine in order to experience greater ease in uprightness.
 - Explorations of Dart Procedures as Primary, Secondary, and Spiralic movement of the spine in kneeling, seated and standing.
 - Use of chairs as stimuli for sitting, standing, balancing.
 - Breathing practices to enhance and improve coordination in the mechanisms for breathing.

- Study of skeletons to develop a better understanding of the anatomy of good use.
- In-class explorations wherein AT concepts are applied directly to dance phrases or scene work or singing.
- Participations in Salons where folks will perform for the class and receive short, personalized coaching from the instructor. Beneficial both as performers and observers

Weekly Breakdown

Week 1- What is the Alexander Technique?

Week 2- Begin by Doing Less (Excitatory vs Inhibitory Muscular Responses) (Conscious Control)

Week 3-Alexander Technique, Habit, and Race: Discuss Resmaa Menakem book and use AT to notice habits that arise when engaging in difficult discussions or situations

Week 4- Inhibition

Week 5- Primary Control (Balanced Relationship of Head/Neck/Spine)

Week 6- Primary Control w/ Anatomy Exploration (Exploring AT Directions)

Week 7- What was Alexander's Process? Discussion and Self-Application

Week 8- Breath and Eyes

Week 9- Dart Procedures with AT principles

Week 10-Direction and Spatial Thinking

Week 11-Salon Day 1

Week 12-Hips/Knees/ Ankles Walking Workshops (stairs)

Week 13-Salon Day 2

Week 14-Salon 3 + Wrap Up