

THTR-419 Alexander Technique for Actors

Units: 2

Spring 2021— Mon, Wed —Time: 4:00 PM - 5:50 PM

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Course Description

Actors, musicians, dancers, and athletes are developing specialized performance skills. They think about coordination but often have a vague concept of what that is. By teaching the basics of functional anatomy and vertebrate organization, combined with increased sensory awareness and kinesthetic sensitivity, the concept of coordination takes on a new perspective and concrete steps to change the movement repertoire become apparent.

The Alexander Technique offers a clear, systematic look into the underlying principles that govern human movement. F.M. Alexander discovered a primary mechanism for achieving balance and ease in uprightness: The head leads the spine in good coordination. This “primary control” is the central mechanism. It alters the physiology of the body by creating more space.

While Alexander Technique has its roots in the performing arts, it is widely accepted as an educational method that focuses primarily on changing habitual behavior. Participants learn to engage the body and mind to reduce tension in daily activities. It is this unique psycho-physical combination that has made Alexander Technique training such an important component of the practical and creative training for performing artists.

The principles and procedures of the Alexander Technique apply across all areas of daily practice and rehearsal routines, to performance and the mitigating of stage fright and health problems.

“Alexander Technique gives us all the things we have been looking for in a system of physical education: Relief from strain due to maladjustment, and consequent improvement in physical and mental health...and along with this, a general heightening of consciousness on all levels. We cannot ask more from any system of education; nor, if we seriously desire to alter human beings in a desirable direction, can we ask any less.”

– Aldous Huxley on Alexander Technique

Learning Objectives

Applying Alexander Technique Principles – Awareness, observation, thinking in activity, using thought to change habits – we will explore how you “use” yourselves in daily activity. This involves recognizing our habitual patterns of movement, voice, breathing and expression; the specific habits that we repeat unknowingly from one activity to the next.

As this awareness becomes clear, we begin the process of subtracting our unconscious habitual reactions in order to bring the student closer to his/her essential self. This leads the performer to true spontaneous response (not habit driven). FM Alexander called this “Psycho-Physical Re-Education.” A healthy by-product of this re-education is a tangible improvement in coordination, posture, flexibility and freedom of movement.

The second phase of the course will layer in what Alexander called “Respiratory Re-education.” Well-coordinated respiratory function is based on proper functioning of an integrated body/mind. Good vocal production is enhanced by optimal breathing coordination.

We can then focus on specific interests: For the actors, stage presence, performance anxiety, stage movement, speaking and singing voice, connecting mind, emotions, and body, and so on. The actual time frame may shift with the progress of the class. It is important to build a strong foundation in AT before applying these new AT tools to individualized interests.

Each lesson will incorporate thematic reading and discussion, as well as activities to illustrate Alexander concepts in an experiential way.

Goals & Objectives:

1. Develop self-care skills for dealing with daily stress for greater strength in dealing with the current challenges we face together.
2. Practical and theoretical knowledge of the principles and practices of the Alexander Technique, including expanded awareness of habits in daily activity.
3. Improvement in the student’s kinesthetic sense, coordination and ease of movement, including breathing coordination.
4. Further the student’s understanding of the integration of the mind and body.
5. Apply the Alexander Principles to breathing coordination, vocal production, and acting.

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials:

Body Learning, Michael Gelb. BUY IT NOW, and start reading.

Various handouts will be posted on Blackboard.

Please collate all handouts into a folder for easy, ongoing reference.

Attendance is Mandatory. If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to find out about what we covered in class, homework assignments, and to obtain any handouts. Also let me know in advance if possible when you are unable to attend.

NOTE: The Goals and Objectives for this course are in service of the UNDERGRADUATE DEGREE PROGRAMS LEARNING OBJECTIVES as follows:

- Provide concentrated training in the essential technical skills and working vocabularies of a specific area of performing arts in order to enable students to realize their professional and artistic goals.
- Develop the students’ unique voices as artists.
- Apply their developing physical, vocal and emotional skills to performances.

Assessment

Based on written assignments, reading, class participation, attendance, and final paper or project. Additionally, students will be evaluated on progress toward Goals and Objectives. All points are awarded based on prompt and effective completion of stated requirements.

100 possible POINTS

Written assignments:

30 POINTS – There will be 3 journal assignments (1-3 pages, double-spaced, 12-point font. Each paper is worth 10 points)

15 POINTS – Midterm Journal, based on Michael Gelb's, *Body Learning*, 3-4 pages

20 POINTS – Final paper (4 - 5 pages), or Project

10 POINTS – Attendance/Participation

25 POINTS – Progress on Achieved Goals and Objectives: 5 stated goals, 5 POINTS each

Grading Scale

(Optional – the following is only an example of what one might look like if included)

Course final grades will be determined using the following scale:

A	96-100
A-	90-95
B+	85-89
B	80-84
B-	70-79
C+	65-69
C	60-64
C-	55-59
D+	50-54
D	45-49
D-	40-44
F	39 and below

Course Schedule and Assignments

Class 1 – Check in - The Tension of Letting Go

Introductions; Acknowledging our present circumstances; what is Alexander Technique, and what does it have to do with all this?

HOMEWORK: Observe heads and necks

Class 2 – Explore Mind/Body Connection

Review Syllabus.

Change your mind to change your body; body language and the head/neck relationship; how does this relate to anatomy of the head, neck and spine. Introducing “primary control”? Review Active Rest practice using the thinking and inactivity to elicit stress reduction and direction, including “spatial thinking”

Activity: Explore spine and weight of head, Active Rest

HANDOUTS: Syllabus, Active Rest

HOMEWORK: JOURNAL 1: Introduce yourself – DUE 1/27, Active Rest

Class 3 – Seat of Power -- Identify your individual sitting/standing habits; directing length and width; change your thinking to change your pattern

Activity: Mechanics of Sit/stand

Activity: Active Rest

HANDOUT: ATI First Lesson

HOMEWORK: Active Rest

HOMEWORK: Self-Observation

JOURNAL 1 DUE today

CLASS 4 – Principles of Awareness, Inhibition, and Direction

Using the AT Principles of *Awareness*, *Inhibition*, and *Direction* to guide your activities; practical application to sitting, bending, standing

Activity: Sit/ Stand with individuals

HANDOUT: Set of Directions; J.Schirle, Excerpts, AT and the Performer

HOMEWORK: Self Observation

Class 5 – Gait Analysis / Walking

Examine habits in walking; what is our strategy for propelling ourselves forward? Animal movement; head leading, body following in walking; review Active Rest

Activity: Trying on each other's walks

HANDOUT: British Medical Journal Study

HOMEWORK: Notice your walking habits

Class 6 – Coordination and Integration

Review sitting, standing, walking with Spatial Directions; explore habits in bending; re-think the benefits of widening; position of mechanical advantage

Activity: Refine sit/stand/walk

Activity: Bending and Widening

HANDOUT: Cherns on Acting

JOURNAL 2 PROMPT: Discovering your habits in movement: Is your head leading, body following? What do you know about your own patterns? How are you working with the principles of Awareness, Inhibition and Direction? **DUE 2/10**

Class 7 – Functional Anatomy

Skeletal structure; anatomy, body mechanics from AT perspective

Activity: Palpating body landmarks HANDOUTS: Back Muscles/Multifidus; Upright

JOURNAL 2 DUE today

Class 8 – Clarify Use of Shoulders and Arms

Explore relationship of head/neck to shoulder girdle and arms; habits in use of arms; good “use” of arms based on primary control and length and width of back; connect arms with support of the back; reaching, lifting, pushing, pulling

Activity: Use of arms in activities, exercise, martial arts, etc.

HANDOUTS: Gelb Glossary

Class 9 – Application of AT Principles to Activities

Staying with AT and spatial directions as you move; warm-ups; stretching; Active Rest

Activity: Stretching and warming up

HANDOUTS: Working Excerpts from M Balk , Art of Running, Art of Working Out

Class 10 – Rollovers and Squatting

Re-thinking these two important activities with Primary Control; taking the load off the legs; squat as four-legged movement; connecting arms to back

Activity: Linklater Roll-downs

Activity: Finessing the Squat

HANDOUTS: Matthews on Squatting

Class 11 – Applied Ergonomics

Basic information about ergonomics and your relationship to the objects in your environment; your desk, chair, computer, car, etc.; simple ergonomic solutions

Activity: Ergonomic evaluation in computer lab

HANDOUTS: Resolving RSI, Comfort Zones, Choosing a Chair, Laptops

HOMEWORK: Re-organize your home and workplace ergonomically

Class 12 – Actor and Character

Consciously going in and out of character; examine your performer self; developing your own warm up using AT; body as instrument; authentic vs. best use; habit and spontaneity; how does your character breathe?

Activity: Tableaus

Activity: Explore character’s physicality and voice

HANDOUTS: McCallion, Stopping/Spontaneity

Class 13 – Integration Class

Review significant concepts; use of arms; secondary directions, as “torso back and up” and “front length”; practice bending; Introduce wall work; relationship of mind and body; how thinking determines habits

Activity: Active Rest and silent counting

Activity: Forward bend on wall – Important before BC

Activity: Exploring Movement and Character Issues

HANDOUTS: Significant Concepts; Pedro de Alcantera. AT Principles

Class 14 – Introduce AT Approach to Breathing

Anatomy of breathing; movement of rib cage/diaphragm; how to stop interfering with breathing process;

Activity: Draw breathing modelsm Active Rest + silent and vocalized counting

HANDOUTS: Gorman Thorax Front/Back; Gorman Diaphragm; Excerpts from J. Wolf’s “Green Machine”/Lungs

HOMEWORK: Download and review Breathing Coordination principles, Home Page, and Help Yourself;

www.breathingcoordination.com

MIDTERM JOURNAL PROMPT: Michael Gelb’s Checkpoints from Body Learning; DUE 3/17

Class 15 – Breathing Coordination and 3-D Movement

Review respiratory function; silent la la la's, silent counting; non end-gaining

Activity: Explore amber light

Activity: Active Rest + silent and vocalized counting

HANDOUTS: McCallion, Breathing Appendix/ Exploded Torso; Psoas; Upright Neck and Vocal Structures

Class 16 – Breathing Coordination and 3-D Movement

Visualizing the internal movement; examine your mental/emotional thoughts regarding your breath; review amber light concept

Activity: Rib Animation Video

Activity: Active Rest + silent and vocalized counting

HANDOUTS: Olsen on Breathing

MIDTERM DUE TODAY

Class 17 – Whispered AH

Introduce Whispered Ah; silent counting; vocalized counting; vocalized ah; vowel sounds; sustained sounds; doing less; connect voice with communicating

Activity: Stough video

Activity: Active Rest + silent and vocalized counting + Whispered Ah

HANDOUTS: Directions for Whispered Ah, Whispered Ah, J. Wolf; Carrington

Class 18 – Spirals in Movement

What do you do to warm-up, physically and vocally? Using your more reliable sensory appreciation; “end-gaining / means whereby” or process / product

Activity: Guided active AT warm-ups

Activity: Read Warming Up

Activity: Going in and out of character's physicality, breath and voice

HANDOUTS: Let's Twist, Dimon; Warming Up, L. Marshall;

Class 19 – Breathing Coordination Warm up

Silent 'la las,' whispered ahs, vocalized hmm ahs; vocalized counting; Sustains, 1-10, hold until 1st kinesthetic message; then silent 2,3, to 2nd kinesthetic message; Amy Cuddy's Power Poses

Activity: Read Actors and Directors on AT; Selected quotes

Activity: Explore Larynx and Omohyoid

HANDOUTS: Actors and Directors on AT; Selected quotes

Journal 3 PROMPT: LEARNING TEXT – DUE 3/29

Class 20 – Fear and Performance Anxiety

Exploring your startle pattern; effect of fear on spatial relationships and breath

Activity: Feel the fear and do it anyway

Activity: Read Fear Pack handouts aloud

Activity: AR and Performance Anxiety practice

HANDOUTS: 3 Types of Fear Response; Fear's Body-Mind; Amygdala/Batman; JBT My Stroke of Insight

JOURNAL 3 DUE TODAY

Class 21 – Mock Auditions / Slating

Using AT skills to regulate your nervous system; using breathing coordination to connect body, mind, emotions; recognizing your nervous habits and applying “conscious inhibition” and direction.

Activity: Monologues and Slating

HANDOUTS: Actor and Character, Richmond

HOMEWORK: Experiment with Performance Anxiety handout

Class 22 -Active Warm-up / Active Character

Staying focused and Directed in Character; staying in your 3-D body; renew your Dynamic Advantage; transitioning to text

Activity: Wall work with text

Activity: Speaking text on Zoom; then text in character

HANDOUTS: Conscious Choice

Class 23 – Advanced Breathing Coordination

Closely observe the transitions from Whispered Ah's to silent to done; vocalized to silent, and silent to done; conscious decision to shift in response to the kinesthetic messages; choosing to extend the exhalation without tightening ; expanding your 3-D body;

Activity: Active Rest + Advanced vocalized counting and beyond

HANDOUTS: Advanced Vocalized Counting/Dangerous Corner

Class 24 – Preparing Your Vocal Instrument

What's your singing stance? Explore open jaw for vowels; how do you visualize scales; breathing into your "voluminous" back; reduce frontal orientation; connecting front to back

Activity: Singing games

Activity: Expanded awareness – singing and moving

HANDOUTS: Karl's notes; Face and Throat, Dimon

Class 25 – Singing

Come prepared with a song you want to sing in class; remember this is an exercise, not a performance; be curious about your singing habits, and how quickly they may pop up once you start; stay with your Primary Control, and your 3-D body/mind

Activity: Singing – have fun

HANDOUTS: Beyond Posture, Hanko

Class 26 – Supporting Your Work on Scenes and Characters From Other Classes

Movement Warmup

Breathing Coordination and Vocal warm-ups

Applying AT to your finals work

Active Rest

FINAL EXAM OR PROJECT PROMPT : DUE DATE TBA

Class 27 & 28 – Applying AT to Monologues

Bring in your work in progress; use active rest and breathing coordination combined with your warm-up; preparation for rehearsal and onstage; practice monologue

Activity: Group led warm-up

Activity: Performance

Provide a detailed course calendar that includes a list of deliverables (homework assignments, examinations, etc.) broken down on a weekly basis. The format may vary, but the content must include:

- Subject matter (topic) or activity
- Required preparatory reading or tasks (e.g., viewing videos)
- Deliverables and when each deliverable is due. A blanket statement that there will be a deliverable due at a specified frequency (e.g., there will be homework due weekly) may obviate the need to state when certain deliverables are due

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct:

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct.

Support Systems:

Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call
studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call
suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention and Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL), press “0” after hours – 24/7 on call
studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)- (213) 740-5086 | Title IX – (213) 821-8298
equity.usc.edu, titleix.usc.edu

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants. The university prohibits discrimination or harassment based on the following *protected characteristics*: race, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, age, physical disability, medical condition, mental disability, marital status, pregnancy, veteran status, genetic information, and any other characteristic which may be specified in applicable laws and governmental regulations. The university also prohibits sexual assault, non-consensual sexual contact, sexual misconduct, intimate partner violence, stalking, malicious dissuasion, retaliation, and violation of interim measures.

Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298
usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care_report

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office of Equity and Diversity | Title IX for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

The Office of Disability Services and Programs - (213) 740-0776
dsp.usc.edu

Support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Services include assistance in providing readers/notetakers/interpreters, special accommodations for test taking needs, assistance with architectural barriers, assistive technology, and support for individual needs.

USC Support and Advocacy - (213) 821-4710

uscса.usc.edu

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

Diversity at USC - (213) 740-2101

diversity.usc.edu

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call

dps.usc.edu, emergency.usc.edu

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-120 – 24/7 on call

dps.usc.edu

Non-emergency assistance or information.