



Notes on the Alexander Technique by Penny McDonald

The **Alexander Technique** is a process; you learn to observe how you are doing things, to be kind to yourself as you analyse if you are doing too much, or using too much tension, and then you change your thinking to allow yourself to do things in a different way.



FM Alexander was born in Tasmania in 1869. He was a highly respected actor who was affected by vocal and breathing problems. **He lost his voice.**

Seeking a cure, he watched himself in the mirror, and discovered that he was standing and breathing in such a way that he was interfering with his body's natural functioning. He found the answer appeared to lie in his posture. He had to re-educate both body and mind, to resist his habits and learn new behaviour.

Gradually his voice problem disappeared and he showed a remarkable improvement in his general health.

Today the **Alexander Technique** is taught and respected in 31 countries, and found in most performing arts institutions around the world.

Change comes with the Power of our thinking, but only if it is positive. **Alexander Technique** works through thinking in activity: identifying our habits and using consciousness to unlearn these. It is practicing mindfulness and presence. Our bodies and minds work together. It is very important that we observe if we are trying too hard to make it happen.

My favourite mantra for applying this work is from Patsy Rodenburg : **Where is my body, Where is my Breath, Where is my Presence.**





The Alexander Technique can help to:

- Relieve and prevent back, neck and limb pain, headaches and other muscular-skeletal problems
- Reduce tension in activities that are repetitive and/or strenuous such as bending, lifting, or typing
- Improve performance in skilled activities such as dance, music, acting, or sport
- Manage stress, improve well-being and self-understanding
- Restore freedom of movement after an accident or chronic illness.

The Alexander Technique is a skill that may be learned to improve how you breathe, how you move, your coordination, your postural support and your whole way of being.



Do semi supine every day.

By lying on your back with your head on some books and your knees bent, you are giving yourself a chance to “check in” with where you are at. You may notice some tension that you can invite to release, do some body mapping, or explore different thoughts and images to give you a connection through your body.

As you prepare to move, pause, float each arm across your body, feeling the connection of arms to pelvis. Roll on the ground for a few minutes, do a few lizards, spend some time on all fours gently rocking and then stand with an ease and a connection to the earth.

Come to quiet

Before we can make any changes, we need to create space to stop the habitual way we do things, and to allow for something different to happen. My favourite phrases to create this space are “I have time”, “take a moment”, “pause and come to quiet”, “allow my whole torso to move with breath”. Within this space, is the possibility for change. We have to actively choose a new pathway and this requires space.



Change your gaze

Allow your eyes to soften. A great exercise is to very slowly scan across the room or horizon allowing your eyes to glide from one object to the next instead of jumping. Then do it again, even more slowly. This will quieten your breath and calm the nervous system.

Allow the images to come to you, know that your eye ball is a hole that receives light. You don't have to grab images, let them come to you.





How does it work?

During a lesson you will also explore the power of your thinking. The thoughts you have, when you are thinking about the changes you may wish for, will determine how effective the change can be. How you apply the Alexander Technique is primarily with the power of your thinking. You will explore the language that is most useful to invite or allow your body to function in a more useful way. It needs to be positive. You get what you ask for. You learn to be kind to yourself.

How the brain allows for change.

We have habitual ways of doing things, we have done them so often that they have become a super highway in our brain, we don't even think about it. If we have discovered this pathway may not be serving us, and we have a desire to change it, we then have to create a space to stop the old pathway, and deliberately run a new path way. The brain may object and tell you it is wrong or weird. Fight back and persist with the new pathway, eventually the brain will accept this, and the new way will eventually become the super highway.



Mind in the Brain – send a message to your body.

If you can keep your mind in the brain and send a thought to different parts of the body you are more likely to co-operate with how we are designed. It helps you keep an awareness of your whole body, and not get caught up in a specific part. Things become easier if you have whole body awareness.



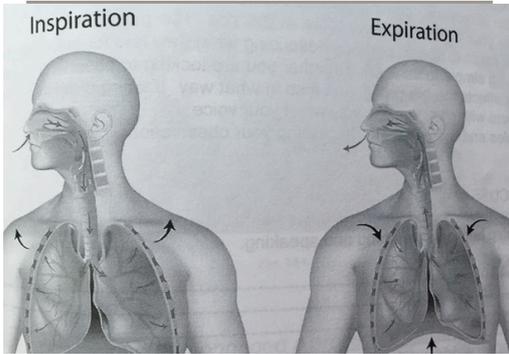
Expand Spatial Awareness

By bringing your attention to the front, side, back of your body, the four walls of the room, and the whole environment outside or the universe, you will notice your breath and sense of yourself will change. You could imagine you are in the middle of a sphere, can you move through daily activities keeping yourself in the centre of your sphere.



You are not learning to relax with the **Alexander Technique**, you are learning to distribute energy.

We think in images. Here are some useful thoughts or images.



Breath

A good free breath is crucial to being alive and enjoying good health. Because the diaphragm is attached to the spine and bottom ribs, the alignment of our skull over our spine is the key determining factor for a free breath. Breathing is a movement that occurs throughout the whole torso in an organised, wave like manner. Allow the air in and out, slow your breathing down. Do the occasional whispered AH where you invite the exhalation to travel to your hard palate. Never gasp for air.



Animals.

It might be useful to think of an animal for yourself. You may need a couple of different animals for different situations.

Allow the thought of its rhythm, ears, tail, haunches, breath and gaze to invite change.

Imagine you have bit feet, and a big long tail and big ears.



HAVE AN INTENTION FOR PRESENCE

Animals are always present, listening and breathing so by finding the essence of an animal, you too can be present, listening and breathing freely.

Think about the weight of your head balancing on your spine, travelling down to your pelvis, through your legs and feet, and into the ground. It can then bounce back up through your whole body, from your feet to the top of your head. You can tap into a buoyancy in the spine. Are you grounded - **allow the weight of your body onto the earth.** As you find the downward flow to the ground you can find the release up. Point the sternum and the sitting bones to the ground.



CHOOSE HAPPINESS - THINK IN THE POSITIVE

Change comes by thinking positively about how you would like to be. You cannot "do" The **Alexander Technique** – you just think it.



Your centre of gravity is about 3 fingers below your belly button, think deep into the middle of your pelvis. Allow the pelvis to be it's full depth, width and height, the power is in the pelvis. Move your arms from your pelvis. When bending, stay back and up, don't drop into your front.



Put some old books on the floor and walk on them for a bit, notice what happens around the pelvis when you step off, you may find a collapse, do it again and try and keep the "up" as you walk off the books.

There are many videos and more information on my web site www.pennymcdonald.com.au or visit my youtube channel https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCVcuHgGYUMXtalud8VI_6-Q/