

The following three reports are the work of the Professional Development Committee and were approved by ATI Members in 1998 (Task 1), 1999 (Task 2) and 2000 (Task 3).

Task I

The Theory of the Alexander Technique

The Alexander Technique is an indirect method of improving human use and functioning. Practice of the technique promotes improving coordination, support, flexibility, balance, clarity of thinking and ease of movement.

F.M. Alexander believed that humans used unconscious instinct to direct their movements. This worked in a slowly changing environment. But as civilization progressed, unconscious instinct was no longer sufficient. Alexander believed that relying on these instinctive responses in new situations was the cause of many if not all of the problems facing people today.

Alexander developed his technique when trying to solve persistent vocal problems threatening his acting career. He observed himself and discovered the following important concepts:

NOTE: We made a distinction between Alexander Technique concepts and Alexander Technique principles. A concept is something that would exist in the world if Alexander had never been born — for example, Primary Control. Primary Control operates even if a person doesn't know about it. Principles are more general and include how one uses the concepts.

Alexander Technique Concepts

1. Primary Control
2. Use Affects Functioning (the Universal Constant)
3. Psycho-physical Unity
4. Faulty Sensory Appreciation
5. Endgaining

Alexander Technique Principles

1. Principle of Prevention on a General Basis (Inhibition and Direction)
2. Principle of Indirect Action (Conscious Direction/Means Whereby Principle)

Definitions (Page numbers refer to the editions listed below.)

Alexander Technique Concepts (adopted by ATI Members in 1998)

NOTE: the numbers in parentheses refer to the number of each item in the above list of concepts.

(1) **Primary control:** Alexander discovered that "pulling back of the head" resulted in a shortening of his stature and a decrease in his ability to function. By allowing his head to move freely in a direction he described as "forward and up" from the top of his spine, a lengthening resulted in his stature and an improvement in his overall functioning. He labeled this discovery **Primary Control**, because this relationship of neck, head and torso determined the quality of his coordination as a whole being.

"...there is a primary control of the use of the self, which governs the working of all the mechanisms and so renders the control of the complex human organism comparatively simple. This primary control...depends upon a certain use of the head and neck in relation to the use of the rest of the body...." (*The Use of the Self*, p.65).

(2) **Use Affects Functioning** (*The Universal Constant*): Alexander discovered that how he used himself affected how he functioned. His misuse resulted in health problems including vocal trouble. When he stopped misusing himself, his voice and his overall health improved.

"A good manner of use of the self exerts an influence for good upon general functioning which is not only continuous, but also grows stronger as time goes on, becoming....a *constant* influence tending always to raise the standard of functioning and improve the manner of reaction. A bad manner of use, on the other hand, continuously exerts an influence for ill tending to lower the standard of general functioning, thus becoming a *constant* influence tending always to interfere with every functional activity...and harmfully affecting the manner of every reaction." (*Universal Constant in Living*, p. 7) "...our manner of use is a constant influence for good or ill upon our general functioning." (*Universal Constant in Living*, p. 12) (Alexander's italics)

(3) **Psycho-physical unity:** Alexander realized if he made a change in one part of his body, that change affected the rest of him. His thinking was reflected in his patterns of use. He concluded there is no division between mind and body.

"...the unity of the human organism is indivisible...[such that]...any change in a part means a change in the whole, and the parts of the human organism are knit so closely into a unity that any attempt to make a fundamental change in the working of a part is bound to alter the use and adjustment of the whole." (*The Use of the Self*, p. 54) "[E]very act is a reaction to a stimulus received through the sensory mechanisms, [and] no act can be described as wholly "mental" or wholly "physical." (*The Use of the Self*, p. 52)

(4) **Faulty Sensory Appreciation:** While Alexander tried to discover a better way to use his voice, he noticed when looking in a mirror, he was not doing what he thought. His feelings, which he called sensory appreciation, were unreliable.

“Almost all civilized human creatures have developed a condition in which the sensory appreciation (feeling) is more or less imperfect and deceptive, and it naturally follows that it cannot be relied upon in re-education, readjustment and co-ordination, or in our attempts to put right something we know to be wrong with our psycho-physical selves.” (*Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual*, p.98)

He explains how faulty sensory appreciation can develop:

"We get into the habit of performing a certain act in a certain way, and we experience a certain feeling in connection with it which we recognize as "right." *The act and the particular feeling associated with it become one in our recognition.*" (*Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual*, p.86 (Alexander's italics)

Alexander believed that if our sensory appreciation is faulty, our judgment is faulty. He writes:

"...[O]ur judgment is based on experience, [and] we must also see that where this experience is incorrect and deceptive, the resulting judgment is bound to be misleading and out of touch with reality. *We have to recognize, therefore, that our sensory peculiarities are the foundation of what we think of as our opinions....*" (*Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual*, p.95) (Alexander's italics)

(5) **End-gaining:** During his experimentation, Alexander discovered his strong desire to reach his goal. He used his habitual, unconscious responses, instead of considering another way (means-whereby). He called this end-gaining and contrasted it with using the best means-whereby to gain his end.

“The “end-gaining” principle involves a direct procedure on the part of the person endeavouring to gain the desired “end.” This direct procedure is associated with dependence upon sub-conscious guidance and control, leading, in cases where a condition of mal-co-ordination is present, to an unsatisfactory use of the mechanisms and to an increase in the defects and peculiarities already existing.” (*Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual*, p. 7, footnote)

From the above concepts, Alexander derived two principles. They are called the Principle of Prevention on a General Basis (Inhibition and Conscious Direction) and the Principle of Indirect Action (Conscious Direction/Means Whereby Principle).

1. **Principle of Prevention on a General Basis** (Inhibition and Conscious Direction). Alexander discovered the first step to improving his use was to stop responding habitually to the idea of speaking. This he described as Inhibition, which allowed him to perform any activity with a beneficial effect on his overall functioning.

"In my work we are concerned primarily with non-doing in the fundamental sense of what we should not do in the use of ourselves in our daily activities; in other words, with preventing that habitual misuse of the psycho-physical mechanisms which renders these activities a constant source of harm to the organism." (*Universal Constant in Living*, p.99)

"The preventive messages projected serve to stop off the misdirection associated with harmful habitual use of ourselves in the performance of an act..." (*Universal Constant in Living*, p.85)

2. Principle of Indirect Action (Conscious Direction/Means Whereby Principle) Alexander's desire to speak was goal driven (Endgaining). He relied on familiar feelings to speak. As he experimented, he developed a new three-step procedure: self observation, relying on reason rather than feelings, and then using this conscious guidance when speaking. This new procedure was an indirect way to gain his end.

He writes that he must "analyse the conditions of use present; select (reason out) the means whereby a more satisfactory use could be brought about; to project *consciously* the directions required for putting these means into effect." (*The Use of the Self*, p. 39) (Alexander's italics).

"The "means-whereby" principle...involves a reasoning consideration of the causes of the conditions present, and an indirect instead of a direct procedure on the part of the person endeavouring to gain the desired "end." (*Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual*, p. 41 footnote)

"Means-whereby"...indicate[s] the reasoned means to the gaining of an end...includ[ing] the inhibition of the habitual use of the mechanisms of the organism, and the conscious projection of new directions necessary to the performance of the different acts involved in a new and more satisfactory use of these mechanisms." (*The Use of the Self*, p. 27, footnote).

Direction "...indicate[s] the process involved in projecting messages from the brain to the mechanisms and in conducting the energy necessary to the use of these mechanisms." (*The Use of the Self*, p. 20, footnote).

The following information is included as a resource.

A Recommended Reading List

This list of chapters and books was recommended by ATI Members and Teacher Trainers. They believe that people who read from this list will have a solid understanding of the Alexander Technique concepts and principles

- From Primitive Conditions to Present Needs (from *Man's Supreme Inheritance*) Part 1, Chapter 1

- Habits of Thought and of Body (from *Man's Supreme Inheritance*) (Part 1, Chapter 6)
- Education and re-education (from *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual*) Part 2, Chapter 1
- Incorrect Conception (from *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual*) Part 2, Chapter 2
- Imperfect Sensory Appreciation (from *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual*) Part 2, Chapter 3
- Illustration (from *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual*) Part 2, Chapter 4
- The Evolution of a Technique (from *The Use of the Self* Chapter 1)
- The Golfer Who Cannot Keep His Eyes on the Ball (from *The Use of the Self*) Chapter 3
- The Stutterer (from *The Use of the Self*) Chapter 4
- The Constant Influence of Manner of Use in Relation to Change (from *The Universal Constant in Living*) Chapter 5
- *Freedom to Change* by Frank Pierce Jones

References and other information

Man's Supreme Inheritance (MSI), Mouritz, 1996.

Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual (CCCI), Mouritz, 2004.

Use of the Self, Victor Gollancz, 1985.

Universal Constant in Living (UCL), Mouritz, 2000

Translations: Currently (2022) all four of Alexander's books are available in Japanese; translations of *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual* and *The Universal Constant in Living* are available in German; translations of *The Use of the Self* are available in German and French.

The Alexander Technique Body of Knowledge

This is a partial list of resources listed historically.

1. Writings by F.M. Alexander.
2. Written memoirs of people who knew Alexander.
3. Biographical accounts of the Alexanders and the history of the technique.
4. Theoretical explorations and research into the technique.
5. Journals, newsletters of Alexander Technique organizations and proceedings of International Congresses.
6. Books about the technique.
7. Oral history of the technique.
8. Videotapes about the technique.
9. There are traditions of teaching being passed on to new generations of students. Embodied in them are our own experiences and understanding as we evolve.

10. Internet sites about the technique.

Task II:

Distinguish the Alexander Technique from other means of improving human use and functioning

Alexander believed that his technique was one of “education in the widest sense of the word, in that it deals with the control of human reaction.” (UCL, p. 28) True change in people’s behavior would occur only if people learned to use the principles of his technique. Then they could make conscious choices in response to any situation.

The five concepts (Primary Control, Psycho-Physical Unity, The Universal Constant, Faulty Sensory Appreciation and Endgaining), and the two principles (Principle of Prevention on a General Basis and Principle of Indirect Action) are the foundation of the practice of the Alexander Technique. They distinguish the Alexander Technique from other means of improving human use and functioning. Although other techniques may include some of the concepts, the Alexander Technique is the only method of improving human use and functioning which (1) teaches an indirect method of consciously preventing interference with one’s best use and functioning, and (2) the only method where its teachers consciously use these principles while teaching others.

Task III:

Develop a means for evaluating the competencies of teachers

In order to be eligible for certification by Alexander Technique International, teaching candidates should be of good character, have a clear understanding of the Alexander Technique concepts and principles, and have the basic skills to convey these concepts and principles clearly to a pupil.

I. Conduct

A. Demonstrate qualities of patience, compassion, honesty and respect in interactions with peers and students. Completion of an Alexander Technique training process shall be considered representation by the candidate’s trainer(s) that the candidate has satisfactorily demonstrated these characteristics, provided the examining teacher sees no evidence to the contrary.

II. Knowledge

A. Demonstrate an embodied understanding of the commonly used Alexander Technique concepts and principles by consciously allowing a positive change in their own psycho-physical coordination, and continue this change throughout any activity in order to improve the quality of their performance. This positive change can be observed as 1) an initial movement of the head in relation to the spine which results in a quality of lengthening throughout the body, allowing the person to respond in a fluid and continually adaptive way to gravity; 2) an enhanced alertness, awareness, fluidity and poise; 3) and a speaking voice that is full, clear, and fluent.

B. Demonstrate a knowledge of Alexander's ideas by discussing their own understanding of the technique and how Alexander's ideas have influenced their development as a person and a teacher; and suggest what literature (by Alexander or other authors) they would recommend to a pupil and why.

C. Demonstrate an understanding of anatomy and physiology as they relate to human movement and behavior; be able to help pupils understand how mistaken ideas about their structure interfere with their best use; answer pupils' basic questions about anatomy, and refer them to other sources for more detailed answers.

D. Demonstrate an understanding of the ATI Code of Ethics, an appreciation of safety issues, and know when it is appropriate to refer a pupil to another professional.

III. Teaching Skills

A. Demonstrate an ability to clearly and simply communicate and demonstrate the concepts and principles of the Alexander Technique by giving clear demonstrations and verbal explanations that are appropriate to the pupil's learning in the moment; when using hands, to use their hands sensitively and appropriately. Both verbal explanations and any use of hands will allow pupils to effect a positive change in their psycho-physical coordination.

B. Demonstrate an ability to observe themselves while teaching, and later articulate to an observer the choices they made with regard to using their hands, verbal explanations and physical demonstrations.