

# Massage Elements Class

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When we explore the massage elements, it opens the doorway for us to improve our attention to detail. Our attention to detail in life is one of the most valuable skills we can have. Those with a high attention to detail often appear to be incredibly lucky because opportunities seem to simply fall on their path. While this may seem to be the case, their opportunities are due to their awareness. They see with keen eyes because they have developed their active and ambient awareness. In massage, we must pay close attention to detail because when we massage our clientele, all they know is our touch. By knowing, realizing, and using the knowledge of our focused awareness, we can dive deeper into the intricacies of touch. This will enable us to pave the way to create, develop, and apply techniques that lead to a transformative massage experience. The following are the massage elements we will discuss and explore in this class:

- **Point**
- **Shape**
- **Pressure**
- **Line**
- **Movement**
- **Temperature**

After completing this class, you will understand the massage elements, their relevance within the art of massage course, and how to integrate them into your massage practice.

## Massage Elements Class

### Elements of Massage

- **Point:** This element is the literal focal point of the technique. The point may be a hand, forearm, elbow, or any other body part the therapist is using. A point may even be the surface of a tool being applied to the client.
- **Shape:** This massage element is the shape of the point being applied to the client.

- **Pressure:** This element is the kinetic force being applied through the point of a technique.
- **Line:** This massage element is a representation of a point moving from one area to another.
- **Movement:** This element represents how a point moves as a line.
- **Temperature:** This is the temperature of the point being applied in a technique.

Massage Elements have two poles, and we can analyze the correspondence between them to learn more about each. For example, when we realize hot and cold are the same in that they are both a measurement of temperature, it opens the doorway for us to explore the subjective nature of assessing temperature. This is important in massage because everything we do is filtered through a subjective lens. Truly, every massage element is interpreted through two lenses, yours and your client's.

When we take the time to explore these concepts it creates opportunities for us to more effectively empathize, because it increases our awareness. If we want to be present and possess the ability to adapt to the needs of our clients in the second, we must be detail-oriented. This means you must be thinking about massage when you are not massaging. You need to dive in deeper, ask questions, and practice.

Additionally, if you seek to provide your clientele with a transformative massage experience, you must be open and welcoming to criticism. You need to listen to their thoughts and feelings so you can adjust and improve. Without input, you will exist in a vacuum or, worse, an echo chamber. Many massage therapists are quick to blame a client for a bad massage experience. They fail to search for ways they may have been at fault for the experience. This is an indication the therapist lacks humility. Humility is a virtue of massage, and without it, you will never provide a transformative massage experience.

## Point

Point is the exploration of touch and the key to providing **Complete Touch** in a massage session. When you are performing a massage feel every point that your hand is touching the client. Dive into the sensation of what you are touching and feel every exquisite detail. Simply running the palm of your hand over someone's back with an effleurage, provides so many sensations, the data is nearly incalculable.

Point is the exploration of **texture**. I want you to invest some considerable time into immersing yourself with the sensations of existence. Everytime we touch something throughout the day we should be exploring every texture and searching for ways to articulate each sensation.

- If we slid our hand over silk, it would feel smooth, silky, soft, and luxuriously slippery. A freshly waxed car would feel sleek and polished, and a velvet cloth would be soft and plush. A windowpane would be hard, cold, and perfectly even.
- Running our hand over sandpaper would feel coarse, harsh, and abrasive. Moving wet sand between our fingers would feel gritty, and with enough focus, we could feel the individual grainy particles. Holding a rock, we might feel the uneven, rugged, and jagged surfaces. A wool sweater against our bare skin may feel scratchy, and the sharp protrusions of tree bark might feel rough.
- Tickling a down-feather against our cheek could feel fluffy, light and airy. We could explore the fine soft hairs of a peach.

### **Homework:**

*As a massage therapist we are offered the unique opportunity to celebrate the magnificent sensations of existence, in a pure and ethical way. If you want to harness the power of touch, you will need to develop the ability to articulate what you are feeling. Go out into the world and feel some objects in the park, touch the sides of a building, place your hand in the dirt. I want you to feel the world.*

*Take a picture of the things you are touching, and then write a little snippet about how they felt when you touched them. If you are someone who doesn't know many words, here are a few to help you get started.*

*Rocky, rigid, stiff, inflexible, bony, hard, knobby, lumpy, pitted, wavy, rippled, ridged, gummy, soft, sticky, tacky, clammy, gluey, smooth, wet, slick, slimy, slippery, soggy, oily, greasy, hairy, wiry, bristly, shaggy, feathery, grainy, sandy, powdery, pebbly, crumbly, rubbery, leathery, waxy, chalky, corrugated, mossy, damp, scaly, and thorny.*

A considerable portion of providing an amazing massage is the act of exploring through palpation. The more aware you become in regard to what you feel on a micro level, the greater you will be able to offer relief on a macro level. Since point is the fundamental element of all other massage elements, this is one you need to really dive into.

What are the poles of point? With point, the poles are touching and not touching. There are no shades of grade between. The application of tapotement is the exercise of creating touching and no touching on a single point.

### **Shape**

When we take the time to think about the shape of the point being applied in a massage, it can enhance our understanding of our client's experience. The

sensation a client feels from a single application of pressure may be significantly influenced by the shape we use to apply it. For example, using a single finger to apply pressure will feel different than two, three or four fingers. The same amount of pressure feels different when we use the palm of our hand, forearm, or elbow. While this may sound like common sense, no-brainer kind of concept, the more we dive into the intricacies of touch, the greater our active and ambient awareness becomes.

- Shape can be defined by the area of touch we apply, which could be called **Size**, and this is measured from small to big.
- Shape may also be defined by the shape of our hand, forearm, tool, etc. If our hand is in the form of a fist, it will feel different than if it were in the shape of a Kungfu chop.

## Pressure

Pressure is an essential massage element that is often defined by the levels of **light**, **medium**, and **firm** pressure. Like the [Massage 101 class](#), this class has been designed to introduce you to the concept of each pressure level, but we will not dive deeper than light. The primary reason is because I want you to develop safe and effective body mechanics before you start increasing the kinetic force. The washout rates of the massage industry are high. The last time I checked, 50% of massage therapists will leave the industry 12 months post-graduation, 70% at three years, and 90% at seven years. I want you to have a long, rewarding, and pain-free career, so I will teach you in steps, slowly preparing you to be capable of providing a full range of pressure.

In my professional opinion too much emphasis is placed on the kinetic force a massage therapist can apply in a session. It does not take strength to create the perception of firm pressure. Primarily pressure is determined by sensation zones. With light pressure I can create the sensation of firm with little to no effort. I want you to have this same ability.

- Pressure is often measured within three main categories: light, medium, and firm pressure.
- When pressure is combined with an understanding of sensation zones, we can create the perception of firm pressure.
- Pressure is often subjective.
- A massage doesn't have to hurt to be beneficial.
- There are five general types of sensation a client can feel in a massage: Pleasure, Meh, Hurts so Good, Rewarding, and Pain.

Our experience of pressure is subjective. How you experience pressure is not the same as everyone else. You must have the humility to accept your sensory experiences are not the same sensory experiences everyone else has. You are not the arbiter of reality, and it is not up to you to decide what level of pressure is the right amount for someone else. This is a trap many massage therapists fall into. There will come a time in your career after you have helped so many people that your ego and experience will try to convince you that you are God's gift to humanity. You must push against this by willfully, and proactively integrating humility into your life. If you think you are best, you are at the top of the mountain, and there is only one direction to go from there. Have the humility to know you always have more to learn, and though you may be an expert, you are not the expert of other people's existence. This is one of the fundamental principles of the massage element of pressure.

This same presumption of believing we know more about other people's feelings than they do is the trap of the empath. No matter how much you believe you know how someone else feels, you don't. The only way you can know how someone feels is by asking them. If you are an empath, know there is a fine line between selfish delusion and the extrasensory abilities of being an empath.

The key to providing excellent pressure is through communication. If you assume, you will never have the clues required to provide someone with the peace and ease they seek. If you fail to ask the correct questions, you will also be flying blind. Experiment with the way you communicate until you find the right way to get the answers you need.

The most effective way of identifying the pressure we are applying is by asking how the pressure feels. We must actively request information from the person we are massaging to gain insight into their unique experience. No matter how experienced you are as a massage therapist or how empathetic you are, you cannot know what someone is thinking or feeling unless they tell you. This is a critical piece of information because when we ask instead of assuming, we can adapt to what they want, instead of giving them what we think they need to receive.

*A great exercise you can do at home is to place your hand on someone's arm or leg (after gaining permission). Once your hand is in a comfortable position, ask them how the pressure feels. After they tell you, increase the force you are applying. The goal is to slowly apply pressure to gauge the difference in pressure levels and to improve your ability to progressively apply pressure. You will apply more force, then ask them how it feels until you have reached the threshold of firm pressure. Once you have reached that a firm level of pressure, reduce the pressure in stages following the same steps until you are apply no pressure at all.*

*After you have performed this exercise, do the same exercise to yourself. The goal is to identify how the pressure applied feels to you.*

## Line

Lines connect two points; they interlink every technique and micro-formula. As a massage element, lines create pathways for every dynamic technique used in a session. They help create consistent and predictable patterns for techniques, micro-formulas, and transitions. With effective use of lines we may apply fluid movements that imperceptibly transition one technique into another. As a result this enables us to create an experience that feels like we are touching the client every second of the session.

Lines do not have to be straight. Like a drawing, we can pen a line on a piece of paper. It can be a straight line between two points, but it may also be twisty, curvy, zig-zag, or any number of other markings.

- Line is the journey between two points.
- Lines are the roads, paths, and highways taken throughout a session.
- A line can be a windy road with twists and turns, it does not have to be a straight line.

The use of lines is an exploration of the body. The more we practice exploring the body, the greater our client's pleasure will become. As mentioned earlier, massage is not a direct flight from point A to B. It is a road trip stopping at every little town and city. We must be actively present within each point so we may encourage our client to feel every twist, turn, start, and stop.

### ***The Teleportation Test:***

*The Teleportation Test is a hands-on practical that is observed by the instructor. Depending on the circumstances it may be recorded to provide the student with an opportunity to see their transitions and movements after the session. The goal is to minimize the number of times a therapist teleports throughout a massage.*

When massaging someone, the only thing that exists to them is the point we are touching them. Since we are their universe, we must maintain constant contact as one continuous and purposeful line of touch. In massage, our lines are our opportunity to create a story on the canvas of our client's skin. We can create a painting of pleasure and peace via the brushstrokes of every technique.

## Movement

- Movement can be defined by how a point moves along a line. It is not the direction or the kind of line; rather, it is *how* the point moves along the line.

- Movement can be either static or dynamic. In effect, the point will either be moving, or it will be stationary.
- Movement can be measured by its rhythm, and its speed, but is significantly affected the lubrication used in the technique.

The two poles of movement are dynamic and static. A **static** technique is one that does not move. In effect its point remains in same location throughout the entire technique. An example of a static technique would be trigger point therapy. A **dynamic** technique is any time the point moves. Effleurage and Petrissage are considered dynamic because the point moves throughout the technique.

- **Rhythm:** This is the flow of a technique, and it may reflect how organic or mechanical it feels. Does the technique feel like a predictable, yet comforting tune? Does it feel random and chaotic? In many respects, a good rhythm feels like gently rolling waves or smooth footsteps in a beautiful dance.
- **Speed:** This is how fast or slow the point moves on the line.
- **Lubricant:** Lubricant is the medium used in a massage to enhance the client's experience. The application of lubricant will significantly alter the client's perception of touch, movement, and pressure. The general types of lubricant used in a massage are none, oil, gel, cream, butter, balm, and lotion.

## Temperature

Temperature is a measure of how hot or cold the technique feels to the client. By default we should be applying warm hands when we are massaging someone. Any other temperature level should be applied purposefully.