

Massage 101

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Massage 101

In the massage 101 course, you will learn the fundamentals of performing massage. This course includes the following classes:

- An introduction to **pressure levels**
- An introduction to **complete touch** and **movement**
- Adapting to the needs of the moment: **freestyling**
- An introduction to **micro-formulas**
- Integrating **transitions** into **micro-formulas**

Massage 101: An Introduction to Pressure Levels

An essential element of massage is the management of pressure. Due to the subjective nature of existence, the pressure you believe you are applying is likely not the same as what someone perceives they are receiving. The concepts of light, medium, and firm pressure may be easily understood in the abstract, but when applied, it is often lost to interpretation. In essence, what I gauge as firm pressure might be light to you. For this reason, the classification of light, medium, and firm pressure is calculated according to the subjective interpretation of a massage therapist based on their knowledge, raw strength/endurance, and experience.

This class will not focus on the professional perception of light, medium, and firm pressure. This is beyond the scope of the massage 101 course. We may discuss the core concepts of deep tissue massage philosophy, but we will not teach deep tissue massage. Attempting to understand the concept of light, medium, and firm pressure is a fool's errand for someone new to massage therapy. This skill must be developed over time, and even then, the perceived range will change from place to place. Codifying or even grasping a universal pressure system typically takes hundreds, if not thousands, of hands-on hours.

Instead, we focus on communication. 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, it opens the doorway for us to invite humility into our lives. Humility is one of the core virtues of massage.

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. This simple exercise will help you develop your ability to gradually apply pressure and effectively communicate.

After you have performed this exercise a few times, I want you to do the same exercise to yourself. The goal is to identify how the pressure applied feels to you. This integrates the empathy component of massage. You need to be able to imagine how your clients feel when you massage them. Empathy is one of the virtues of massage, and it will be mentioned throughout all of my courses.

Empathy and communication are critical components of a massage. To help my clients communicate what they are feeling throughout a massage, I have outlined the five sensations someone can experience in a session.

- **Pleasure**
- **Meh**
- **Hurts So Good**
- **Rewarding**
- **Pain**

If you would like to learn more about these sensation follow the link below.

When giving a massage, you should actively attempt to provide your client with the pressure they desire. I call this their **perfect pressure** or their **Goldilocks pressure**. This means it isn't too much or too little; it is just right. To achieve their perfect pressure, you must be an effective communicator.

Some of the ways to open the doorway to effective communication include,

- **Create a safe, comfortable, and serene environment.**
- **Establish your credibility through professional conduct.**
- **Actively attempt to reduce their perceived power differential**
- **Humanize them with empathy and compassion.**
- **Actively listen to them and be appropriate and professionally genuine with your responses.**
- **Immediately adjust your approach to meet their needs.**
- **Honor their boundaries.**

- **Respect their time.**
- **Provide an ethical and professionally appropriate massage experience.**
- **Exude confidence and radiate an aura of trust and safety.**

Communication and empathy are critical components of a massage. When clients know you are listening to them and will adapt to their needs, it encourages them to relax. This is important because if they do not feel safe, their muscles will armor against your touch. When someone's muscles armor against your touch, it desensitizes their body because their central nervous system is attempting to protect the body. As a consequence, you may feel the need to apply more force, which may increase the likelihood they are bruised in the process. Using inappropriate and painful pressure has a tendency to encourage a negative feedback loop of pain. In a massage, we should search for ways to interrupt the negative feedback loop so we may promote a positive feedback loop of pleasure and peace.

To promote a state of relaxation, we must create a safe space. The factors influencing their perception are:

- The conscious trust the client has toward you.
- The unconscious trust the client has toward you.
- The client's stress level.

Your appearance, outward professionalism, organization and preparation, tone and cadence of your voice, and speaking may influence the client's conscious trust. The client's **unconscious trust** may be influenced by how you touch them and adapt to their requests and needs. The client's **stress level** may be influenced by the environment, how you treat them, and the massage/customer service experience.

In pain management massage, I do everything in my power to help my clients enter a state of peace and ease. This includes taking the time to understand their pathological conditions. Research is our best friend when trying to serve as our client's helper and guide. It can be incredibly uplifting knowing someone has taken time out of their day to gain an understanding of your plight. In many respects, it makes you feel like you have an additional ally in your life, someone who can see your circumstance in a new way and perhaps illuminate hidden paths. Of course, the research and insight provided is not a replacement for medical treatment or a diagnosis.

Factors outside of your control within a massage may affect a client's perception of your pressure. These may include:

- **Hypersensitive areas and desensitization.**
- **Neuropathy, nerve damage, and neurological dysfunction.**
- **Pathological conditions and injuries.**

Beyond these factors, there are direct ways you may influence a client's perception of your pressure. These include:

- **The muscles you are massaging.**
- **The anatomical location, and muscle fibers being massaged.**
- **How pressure is applied and released.**
- **How the muscle is being massaged.**
- **The speed of a technique.**
- **The number of times a technique is used in succession and in a session.**
- **The amount of force you apply.**

An array of factors influence how pressure is perceived in a massage. Understanding how we can directly and indirectly affect our clients' experience is an essential component of providing a transformative massage experience.

Massage 101: An Introduction to Complete Touch and Complete Movements

In this section of Massage 101 we are exploring **complete touch** and **complete movements**. Possessing a fundamental understanding of these concepts will improve the quality of all of your massages by a tremendous degree. Complete touch is divided into three parts: Being present in the moment, remaining Invested in your client's experience, and applying touch with the entirety of your hand. In this 101 massage class we will only be discussing how to move the full length of a muscle in the Complete Movements section.

Complete Touch

What is Complete Touch? Complete touch is when our client can feel our presence, investment and absolute focus on them in every second, and between every second. It is a sensation that is easily felt but is difficult to describe. In my massage 101 classes, I dive deeper into how complete touch feels and how to apply it. The information provided here will help you gain a firmer grasp of what it is, how to develop it in your practice and integrate it into every massage you perform.

1. Be Present in the Moment

We are busy bees constantly trying to accomplish something, whether it is to enjoy some leisure, finish chores, or power through work. The world is jam-packed with distractions; everywhere we go, we have a computer in our pocket that connects us to everyone and everything in the world. The artificial interconnectedness of our environment makes it challenging to disconnect and just sit in the silence of the second. If you want to learn how to offer Complete Touch, you must learn how to disconnect, exist in the second, and be present in the moment.

Throughout this section, I want you to reflect on the following three concepts as you read.

- We must be **consciously attentive** with our touch. This means we must be intentional, alert, mindful, and considerate throughout every second of the massage.
- We must be **thoroughly engrossed**. This means we are giving all of our attention to how every detail of their soft tissues feels. We are curious, ethically explorative, and

fascinated by every intricate detail.

- We must be **attentively absorbed**. This means we are fully engaged and focused on what we feel with our hands. All of our attention and energy must be directed toward feeling their body with the totality of our hand. In effect, we are completely immersed and captivated by the experience.

To achieve this state we must be present in the moment, focusing the totality of our attention toward their current experience. We must invest additional effort to reduce the distractions of our environment and within our mind, offer our focused attention, be intentional with our awareness, have wholesome eyes, and engage our senses.

Focused Attention

We must offer our complete attention to the second. Providing complete touch requires us to be fully engaged with what we are doing. We must let go of everything that happened earlier or could happen later.

Intentional Awareness

We must consciously choose to focus on the present moment. This requires practice and discipline. Choose what fills your mind; do not let it wander like a child. Lasso your thoughts and feelings so you don't have to chase them down when they start wandering away.

Have Wholesome Eyes

When you look at the body before you, see it as a spirit who is seeking peace and ease. Filter your sight through a lens of love, one that wants to see them rise high into the sky like a hopeful dove.

Remove the woeful and wicked programs of society from your eyes. Cleanse your heart of haughtiness, lust and envy. Search for the brilliant divine light within the life before you, and celebrate them for being alive. We should be actively seeking to see them as a whole person, rather than the sum of their parts. Whether they are a man or woman we must see them first and foremost as a human who is hurting, is seeking peace, or needs some ease.

At the core of offering complete touch, we must train our sight to see with wholesome eyes.

Reduce Distractions

Our environment will influence how present we can be. Therefore, we must actively seek to remove the distractions around us.

- **Minimizing External Distractions:** If you are new to massage, you must turn off the television, silence your cell phone, and remove any demanding elements from your environment. If you see the glow of your cell phone it will enchant your eyes and steal your sight away from the second. The clamor and rattle of your phone will draw you to it like a puppet with strings connected to your bones. If the television is prattling on about this or that, the weak and undisciplined areas of your brain will steer your attention away.

Your environment must be serene, quiet, and as peaceful as it can be. You must create a space that is still and does not test your will. It must feel safe, comfortable, and allow you to ground without any distracting sights or sounds.

- **Manage your Internal Distractions:** Many will advise you to empty your mind with vacuous meditations. Do not do this. Nature abhors a vacuum. If you do not fill your mind with what you want to think, some other force will fill it for you. Be the faucet that fills your mental sink. Focus your mind with patience and discipline and force out the foes of distraction. In this moment you should be focused on what you feel with your hands. Everything that exists outside of your current experience does not matter. Any time an issue attempts to distract you, know that you can and will deal with it later.

Engage Your Senses

To engage your senses you will need to practice patience, take your time, feel, search, question, and explore every exquisite sensation. Leave your lustful, selfish and haughty inclinations at the door, and explore with curious, altruistic, and purposeful intent.

2. Be Invested

The pleasure we experience from a massage is significantly influenced by the interest, enthusiasm, and engagement of the person touching us. Receiving **apathetic touch** is miserable because it feels like an obligatory interaction. It is a cold, lifeless, and robotic sensation. It lacks enthusiasm, altruistic intention, and the genuine drive to help others live their best life. When we sense someone is interacting with us due to obligation, it saps away the magnificence of the moment, creates the inverse of peace, and leeches away our sense of ease.

Offering complete touch is the willful act of being invested in our client's experience. It is giving goodness for the sake of goodness, thinking of ways we can help them feel wonderful, and searching for sensations that will help them feel spectacular.

3. Touch with the Entirety of Your Hand

Place your hand on a table, or a hard flat surface. Press your hand down enough so every inch of your skin is flush with the surface. Whether your fingers are splayed out or close together every shred of your skin should be touching the table.

Feel and explore the sensation of the flat surface. Now explore the sensation of shifting the weight of your hand. Take the time to experience every sensation. Now press down with greater force, feel the flesh of your fingers smush.

When you massage someone you should be seeking to have every inch of your hand on your client's skin. Be completely present in mind, body and spirit.

Massage 101: Adapting to the Needs of the Moment: Freestyling

The key elements of this massage 101 class are:

- **Creativity** and **Empathy** are the core virtues of Freestyling.
- Freestyling utilizes the **Artistic Elements and Principles of Massage**.
- Freestyling requires the use of the **Rule of 3**. This is for your client's benefit and it provides you enough time to memorize it if your client enjoyed an experimental movement.

In this massage 101 class the student will learn and develop their own techniques using the fundamentals found within the artistic elements and principles of massage. The goal of this class is to provide the student with unlimited access to techniques via creative exploration.

Massage 101: An Introduction to Micro-Formulas

Micro-formulas are three or more techniques that are always performed in sequence. Creating micro-formulas help improve memory retention of techniques, promote harmony and balance within a massage, and develop strategies throughout the massage to maximize a clients results. In this massage 101 class student will interlink the techniques they learned and discovered in the Freestyling class to improve their hands on skills.

Massage 101: Integrating Transitions into Micro-Formulas

The effective use of transitions can transform a three star massage into a five star adventure. Transitions help fill the seconds between seconds, so clients feel like they are always being touched and massaged. In this class the student will learn how interlink their micro-formulas together so their massage feels like **one continuous line**.