

DEFINITIONS FOR SOME COMMONLY USED ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE TERMS

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Alexander used a number of terms to describe his work, many of which need context to understand. Not all Alexander Technique teachers use all of these terms; if they do, here is a guide to what the terms mean.

End-gaining: End-gaining is something we all do. It means going directly for our goal without stopping to consider the means-whereby, or the “how” we might gain our end. When we end-gain, we are reacting habitually. (See habit, below). Alexander found that he end-gained when he tried to recite: he went immediately to his end, without noticing how he got there. As a result, he lost his voice while reciting.

Means-whereby: Using an appropriate means-whereby to achieve any goal means that we have considered that goal, figured out what steps are necessary to reach it, and that we then do each step, in their proper order. Paying attention to the means-whereby allows you to notice how you are doing what you are doing, and to improve your doing of any activity in the process of doing it. It is an indirect, process oriented way of successfully reaching any goal. Alexander, in the first chapter of his book *The Use of the Self*, describes how he worked out a means-whereby he could recite without harming his voice.

Inhibition: If we end-gain to reach our goal, we don’t give ourselves time to stop and consider what might be a better means-whereby we can reach that goal. Inhibition simply means to wait before reacting immediately to any stimulus, to give yourself that brief moment so you can respond consciously and constructively. The process of inhibition continues while you are employing the means-whereby you have decided upon to reach your desired goal. Alexander made inhibition the first step in the plan he devised to solve his vocal problems.

Primary Control: Alexander used this term to describe the observation he made about the relationship of his whole head to his whole body. He found that when he tightened his neck, he pulled his head backward and down from the top of his spine, gasped for air when speaking and depressed his larynx. He then found, through much experimentation, that if he moved his head in such a way that his head moved forward and up and his whole body followed (his stature lengthened) his vocal quality improved. He used the word “primary” because that change in the poise of his head on the top of his spine happened before any other change in the rest of him. He used the word “control” because the quality of this relationship determines the quality with which you move, i.e. controls that quality. Many Alexander Technique teachers do not use this term.

Sensory Appreciation: Sensory appreciation refers to the information we get from our senses, and how we interpret that information. For example, you place a hand in some water and say “Wow! That’s hot!” The water may be “hot,” i.e. 95 degrees, or it may be only 60 degrees in temperature, but you might have just come in from scraping the frost off your windshield, without gloves on, in subfreezing weather. Sensory appreciation is also how you know where you are in space, and how you are moving. The terms kinesthesia, kinesthesia and proprioception all refer to the sensory appreciation that we use to know how and where we are.

Faulty Sensory Appreciation: Remember that sensory appreciation is not only the information

we get from our senses, but how we interpret that information. Was the water in the example above really hot? It was truly hot to you—it may not have been hot to someone whose hands were quite warm. We get accustomed to the way we move and think, and it feels right and natural to us, but how we are *actually* moving may be very different from what we *believe* we are doing. It often happens in Alexander Technique lessons that when a pupil changes how they stand, they feel as though they are falling forward. Is their sensory appreciation faulty? Well, they don't fall, so we could say that yes, it is faulty, or wrong. On the other hand, they feel like they are falling forward because they *are* forward of where they typically stand, which is, in this example, is leaning backwards in some way. It is common for students in Alexander Technique lessons to experience ways of moving that feel quite different from how they usually feel.

Directing: Directing refers to the process we use, either consciously or unconsciously, to make any kind of movement. If we want to pick up a pen from our desk, for example, we direct our hand and arm to move in such a way that we pick up the pen. Because we are always moving, we are always directing ourselves in movement. Most of the time we direct ourselves habitually, i.e. without much conscious awareness. We can learn to direct ourselves consciously, and learning that skill is part of learning to use the Alexander Technique.

Orders or Directions: The commands which Alexander devised to enable him to consciously direct himself. The original directions are: the neck to relax, the head to go forward and up, the back to lengthen and widen. Many teachers have adapted these directions and use different wording.

Habit: Any unconscious pattern of behavior. Many people think of habits as bad; habits are not good or bad, they just are. When we learn any new way of moving (which means we are learning a new way of thinking) we experiment, see what works, and choose to do that. We all did this as infants, and we still do it as adults. Habits are only “bad” if we are moving (thinking) in a way that is not helpful to us.

Habitual Use: The way in which we habitually direct ourselves in movement; how we habitually do things; the way we move without thinking.