

# The Kate Conklin Foundations Course for Professional Singers

## Singing With Your Whole Self

“The hallmarks of the Alexander Technique are creativity, spontaneity, and adaptability to change.”

A.R. Alexander

### Kate’s Introduction to the Alexander Technique

I describe the Alexander Technique as tool that can be used to do something with quality. What follows is my current description of the Alexander Technique, and definitions of relevant terms.

**The Alexander Technique is: conscious, constructive thinking, cooperating with design\* as a creative response to desire.**

*Desire* represents what we want; both generally, as in to find out what else is possible; or it could be very specific, a particular way of landing a jump or executing a musical phrase.

*Creative response* means an adaptable, flexible framework that provides easily varied and spontaneous ways to act.

*Cooperating with design* means to willingly comply with our own structure and functioning, anatomy, psychology etc.

*Conscious, constructive thinking* means thinking that is purposeful and active. The initial step of the process is cognitive, and is an action that is positive.

**The process is:**

I use my conscious constructive thinking  
so that I can cooperate with design,  
so that I can do something I care about with quality.

**The Alexander Technique can be used for purpose, or play.**

*Play 'is an activity which proceeds within certain limits of time and space, in a visible order, according to rules freely accepted, and outside the sphere of necessity or material utility. The play mood is one of rapture and enthusiasm, and is sacred or festive in accordance with the occasion. A feeling of exultation and tension accompanies the action'*

*(Ackerman 1999, p. 3)....*

## Key Design Information and Concepts

**We are whole.**

Humans are complex, living systems.

**We are alive and moving.**

We are always in movement, even when relatively still. This is essential to understand about the human system if you wish to guide it on specific ways.

**We are embodied thinkers.**

Thinking and movement are not separate; they are an integrated, interdependent system.

**We are relatively literal thinkers.**

How we understand and interpret ideas and movement depends greatly on how we understand the words used to describe something. We have psycho-physical definitions for many existing words, so it is of utmost importance that we articulate our observations and plans (directions) in ways that are appropriate, specific and constructive.

**We experience and observe with all our senses.**

There are 21 generally accepted senses. I am available to using all of them in observing the quality of coordination and performance.

## Key Terms and Definitions

These terms are defined below as I use them.

### Relevant Design Information:

I describe information about anatomy, functioning, cognition, neurobiology etc this way. The qualifier "relevant" refers to the timing and amount of information, which is as it's useful to the situation at hand.

### Cognition:

The mental action or process of acquiring knowledge and understanding through thought, experience, and the senses.

### Constructive:

Serving a useful purpose; tending to build up. A verb that is is yes.

### Coordinate:

1. Bring the different elements of (a complex activity or organization) into a relationship that will ensure efficiency or harmony
2. Negotiate with others in order to work together effectively:

### Creative:

Creativity is a key property of all life; it is inherent in all forms of life. Inventiveness, imagination and innovation are all included in how I use this word.

### Professional:

I use this to mean to engage in an activity with something where demands are placed on one's skills. It's meant to refer to a level of skill and execution consummate with a primary occupation or profession, whether or not it is compensated.

### Performance:

Intentional communication with an audience, using skilled excitation.

### Quality:

I use this term in all of the following ways, as according to the Oxford English Dictionary:

1. The standard of something as measured against other things of a similar kind; the degree of excellence of something

2. General excellence of standard or level
3. A distinctive attribute or characteristic possessed by someone or something
4. The distinguishing characteristic or characteristics
5. *Music* another term for timbre.

Skill:

The ability to do something well; expertise; particular ability

## Primary Design Feature of Humans, and All Vertebrate Mammals

The head/spine relationship is the primary organizing mechanism of all vertebrate mammalian movement.

"Asking to coordinate" means to: Ask my head to move delicately at the top of my spine, so that all of me can follow, so that I can do what I'm doing.

"I ask myself to coordinate ( to ask my head to move delicately at the top of my spine, so that all of me can follow) so that I can do what I'm doing.

## Voice Design and Concepts

The voice is a receptive responsive instrument that is part of a whole self organization.

To ask into specific aspects of coordination particular to skilled voice work, we need accurate information about design.

Jaw/Temporomandibular joint:

A two-part joint that is designed to both hinge and glide in a supple, responsive compound movement.

Larynx:

Sits in a swing of muscles that move when breathing, swallowing, speaking and singing.

Airway/Glottis:

The top of your airway or windpipe, where air is always moving through unless you are holding your breath.

## Warm Ups/ Experiments

1. "Move everything":

Asking all of you to move in a gentle, continuous way to wake up the proprioceptive sense, and invite your whole self into coordination.

2. Ask to coordinate to:

Do a movement

Sing a phrase

3. Reverse AT/ Deciding to coordinate:

Initiate a movement with a bit of stiffening between head and spine. As you go through your movement, ask to coordinate en route.

## Rehearsals & Practical Application

In your own practice, ask to coordinate to:

begin your warm up,

make your coffee,

answer an email...

Take a few notes on how that goes and what you notice.

Play with an idea from the vocal information, and make a unified, whole self, constructive, present moment movement plan that includes that detail, i.e.

"I ask to coordinate so that my jaw can move in a supple and responsive way so that I can sing this phrase."

"We are not nouns, we are verbs. I am not a thing...an actor, a writer...I am a person who does things...I write, I act...and I never know what I'm going to do next. I think you can be imprisoned if you think of yourself as a noun."

Stephen Fry