

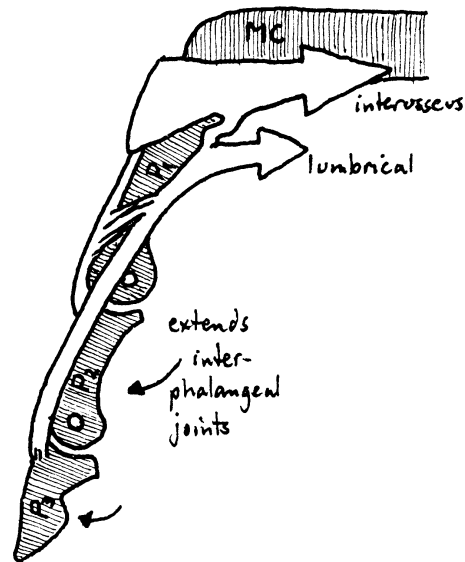
Hands on the back of a chair: straight fingers

The hands on the back of a chair procedure described in “Illustration” involves the instruction “to grasp the top rail of the back of the chair gently and firmly, keeping the fingers as straight as possible and quite flat against the ... front portion of the top rail...” (CCCI, Mouritz 2004, p. 117) – second (medial) and third (distal) phalanges overlapping the front of the rail. The large knuckles are the **metacarpo-phalangeal** joints, i.e. joints between the metacarpals of the hand and first phalanges of the fingers.

The thumb has “also to be kept as straight as possible” is lengthened downwards on the back of the chair rail to oppose the first finger. In doing so, the wrist is curved slightly inward – i.e. ulna deviation. By this action the hand and wrist are positioned with some wrist extension and slight ulna deviation “essential for best flexor power of the fingers.” (Gorman II, p. 123)

The aim is to take hold of the chair rail with as little shortening of the long finger muscles in the forearm¹ as is necessary.

Bending the fingers at the large knuckles only can be achieved by the intrinsic muscles of the hand, i.e. **Lumbricals** and **Interossei**.



“The Interossei, in conjunction with the Lumbricals, *flex the first phalanges* at the metacarpo-phalangeal joints, and *extend the second and third phalanges* in consequence of their insertion into the expansion of the extensor tendons.” (Grays, pp. 408-9)

“One often over looked effect of the Lumbricals results when they contract to extend the inter-phalangeal joints, they necessarily exert a pull upon the flexor digitorum [profundus] tendon from which they arise thereby relaxing the distal part of that tendon... In effect, because of their diagonal course, contraction of the Lumbricals [transforms the flexor into an extensor muscle].”

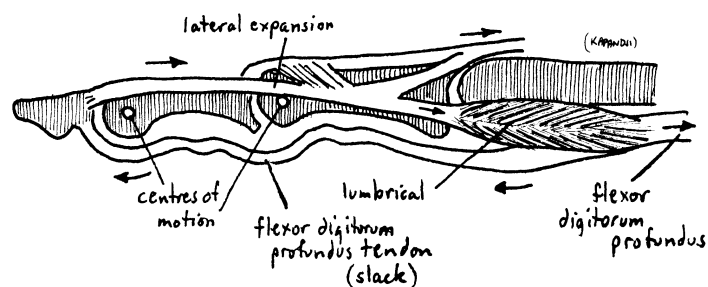


Diagram in Gorman, *Body Moveable II*, page 121f. Action: The metacarpo-phalangeal joint is first flexed by action of the Lumbricals, and then by the Interossei acting secondarily on the

¹ These muscles are **Flexor digitorum superficialis** and **profundus**, and **Extensor digitorum**.

extensor expansions. With the metacarpo-phalangeal joints fully flexed and the inter-phalangeal joints extended, there is efficient engagement of Extensor digitorum, Interossei and Lumbrical in extension of the finger joints.

Together with the “forearm pull” (i.e. usually referred to as a pull to the elbows) the main purpose is to co-ordinate the arms with the muscles of the back (Latissimus dorsi) to maximise breathing function, thoracic capacity and, what Alexander called, “widening of the back”. If the muscles at the front of the upper arm (Biceps, and Pectoralis major and minor) are habitually overused then there is undue narrowing across the upper chest. The arms lack the support of the large “lifting muscles” and are over-tensed.

“Pull to the elbows” like “knees forward and away”² is an isometric muscular exercise. Alexander tells the teacher “to take hold of the pupil’s elbows and direct them outwards and slightly downwards... in such a way that the pupil will be supporting the torso with the arms.” (p. 120) In the case of going into Monkey, sufficient “stress” (see Roberts’ Foreword in *The Act of Living*, p. xi) is created by the body’s weight so that there is no need for an equivalent pull from the thigh.

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² In *CCCI* hands on the back of a chair is described with the pupil sitting. Walter Carrington said that doing it standing in Monkey gives most private pupils too much to think about all at once, but for trainees this is not such a problem and is preferable.