

Wall Work

Wall work, like chair work and table work, is part of a teacher's repertoire of teaching procedures to improve a student's "conditions" of use and to practise applying the Technique.

Wall work is described in 1910¹ along with an early version of Hands on the Back of a Chair. Alexander called it "Door Exercise (Standing)". He used the door because he did not want to mark the wallpaper, so we are told.

He writes:

"The pupil should stand 6 to 12 inches from the door in accordance with the requirements of the particular individual. The teacher should then inform him that he wishes his (the pupil's) hips to move towards the door until the body is supported by the door and the torso extends away from it at an angle of about 25 to 30 degrees.

Finding that most pupils stiffen their legs, Alexander explains how it should be done:

". . . by ordering or desiring the relaxation of the parts concerned so that the hinge-like movement of the hip joints and other parts . . . takes place.

"When the body, in [the] region of the hips, has touched the door and the torso is leaning forward . . . the teacher should then ask the pupil to order his neck to relax and his head to move forward, while the teacher causes the torso to move backwards until it is supported by the door. The pupil should then be asked to order the body and neck to relax and the head to move forward and upward while he (the teacher) causes the body to be correctly supported by the door and brings about the correct and adequate movements of the different muscular mechanisms (A&L, 104-5)

Walter and Dilys Carrington never did wall work on their training course. (Walter once dismissively referred to it as [Wilfred] Barlow's skiing exercise.) The only thing approaching it was to stand a few inches away from a wall and release in the front of the ankles so that you could come back a little further than "feels safe". When asked, Walter said that, when he trained (1935-8), Alexander didn't use wall work, he'd moved on. Marjory Barlow, however, trained earlier and said that wall work was included in her training. The wall work I know was learned from Anne Battye who trained with Marjory.²

Wall work incorporates elements of other procedures: (1) going up on toes, (2) table work – imagine the table has been turned 90 degrees to the vertical. Because legs are weight-bearing, I find that wall work is particularly useful for exploring staying back and co-ordinating legs with (lower) back.

Though I don't routinely use wall work it is useful for making musicians aware of the common tendency to throw the hips forward and "lose the back" when they lift their instrument.

I use a version of wall work shown me (and MATTS students) by Elisabeth Walker. Instead of using a wall, Elisabeth brought her hips back to the edge of the table. You can stop a student at the moment they are about to get off the table. While still sitting on the edge, ask them to place the front of their feet on the ground and come forward from the hips. As they do, "lengthen their heels" while keeping hips back and head leading into standing. MW 5/12/2022; 18/02/2023

¹ 'Supplement to Re-Education of the Kinaesthetic Systems Concerned with the Development of Robust Physical Well-Being. 28 April 1910' in *Articles and Lectures*, pp.103-5.

² *Alexander Technique: the Ground Rules*, Marjory Barlow (HITE 2011). 'Using the Wall', pp.127-131.

