Categorizing the Techniques

In general, the techniques can be broken into several broad categories: superficial techniques, compression techniques, kneading techniques, squeezing techniques, percussion techniques, and frictions. You'll find that almost every technique you'll learn falls under one of these categories.

Chair massage requires a different approach than table massage. The categorization of the techniques may not be what you're used to. Don't get too caught up in comparing the techniques or the labels to Swedish massage techniques that you've learned. I've grouped techniques under the categories outlined below simply as a learning tool. The techniques in each group share similar principles of application and by categorizing in this way you can more quickly learn to apply the basic principles of application for any given technique within the group.

Superficial Techniques

Superficial techniques, like the name implies, are techniques that are performed with very little pressure or force. There is no attempt to manipulate the tissue. These are incorporated so that your massage has a certain level of flow or fluidity. They are used largely to introduce your touch to clients and allow them some time to transition into a relaxation state before you begin your massage. They are also used to provide smooth transitions from region to region. It's best to use a broad contact with these techniques to minimize the possibility of tickling your client.

Compression Techniques

Compression techniques are what many people may think of as acupressure techniques. They involve a straight compression into the tissue with some part of your body, like your thumb or elbow for example. The most important element to remember when performing any compression technique is that the pressure is applied at right angles (at 90 degrees or perpendicular) to the area of the body being worked on. There is no sliding or gliding action. You press into the tissue and release your pressure completely to move onto the next spot. The transfer of weight in and out of the muscles should be slow, even, and deliberate for the best relaxation effect. These techniques can be very broad of very specific.

Squeezing Techniques

Squeezing techniques are when a muscle is squeezed between two contact points. The most important thing to remember when performing any squeezing technique is to get your contact points on the edge of the muscle. Grab too little and you'll pinch your client; grab too much and you will likely be squeezing bones. Getting your contact points precisely on the edges of the muscle ensures your efforts are directed specifically to the muscles you want to target so that your massage is as effective as possible.

Kneading Techniques

Kneading techniques involve a circular motion. Remember, as you are doing kneading actions, relax through part of each movement. When doing compression or squeezing techniques, you have to relax your hands as you lift them to move to another area. With kneading techniques, this release phase is not inherent in the movement. Thus, you need to make a conscious effort to do so to prevent your hands and your body from overworking and fatiguing too quickly.

Percussion Techniques

Percussion techniques are like the old Swedish-style techniques in which light springy blows are applied to the body. They tend to be invigorating when performed for short periods. When maintained for a longer duration, they can be very relaxing. It's important to understand that the percussion should feel very light and pleasant. This is achieved by focusing on the movement of the hands away from the body. When you focus too much on the hitting (or downward) action, the movement feels very heavy and uncomfortable, like someone's beating on you. There should be little or no movement in clients' bodies as you apply this technique. If it looks like they are bouncing or vibrating in the chair, the technique is too heavy.

Friction Techniques

When it comes to Swedish massage, it seems as though everyone has their own interpretation of a friction technique. For the purposes of this book, we'll say that a friction technique is one where the skin (and clothing) moves with the fingers (or other contact point) and the pressure is sustained throughout the movement. This is more along the lines of what's typically thought of as a Cyriax or cross-fiber friction, although with the techniques you'll learn, we typically move in the direction of the muscle fibers. The key distinguishing feature of a friction in this book is that there is no release phase in the movement; firm pressure is maintained throughout the movement. You'll need to make sure that there is good reinforcement of your contact point to minimize stress to your hands. You'll also want to make sure that you don't perform this technique for long periods of time. Instead, focus on a limited area, then perform other techniques to give your muscles a chance to recover before going back to doing frictions in another area.

Points of Contact

Very little of what I say or do in teaching these chair massage techniques is random. I tend to be very systematic and purposeful in my approach and the language that I use. As you read through descriptions of the various techniques, you should pay close attention to the specific terminology I use in describing the various contact points on your hands and arms. Let me outline some of these for you:

Tips of the fingers: The distal ends of the fingers provide a very specific contact point. You'll use the tips of the fingers when you want to catch the edge of a muscle in a squeezing technique. If you are using the tips of the fingers in a squeezing technique, you'll notice that there is a nice curve in your hand and fingers as it forms a C-shape.

Pads of the fingers: This is the broad surface of the fingers. When you use the pads of your fingers, think of leaving your fingerprints on your client. Typically, when using the pads of your fingers, your hand is open and the distal phalanges are reinforced in some way. When doing squeezes to large muscle groups in the upper arm or leg, you'll find that you'll need to keep your interphalageal joints extended, so that your hand is in a V-shape to prevent the fingers from rolling off muscle and pinching your client.

Tip of the thumb: This refers to the most distal part of the thumb. You'll find that if the thumb is correctly aligned in the direction of force, you'll naturally use the tip.

Pad of the thumb: If you use this fleshier part of the thumb, the pad, when doing compression techniques, you'll see that your thumb joints will be forced into extension—no good if you want a long pain-free career. You'll occasionally use the pad of the thumb, but when you do, the entire thumb will be flat against the body and the force with come from the reinforcing hand.

Heel of the hand: The broad part of the hand just distal to the crease of the wrist.

Heel of the thumb: To get technical, the thenar eminence; to be more specific, the metacarpal of the thumb.

Base of the thumb: The head of the metacarpal of the thumb. You'll use this when squeezing small muscles with the hand. You'll find that extending the thumb will help make the head of the metacarpal a more solid base when using this as a contact point.

Fist: This is a broad contact with the back of the fist, that is, the flat surfaces of the first phalanges.

Knuckles: These are your big knuckles—your metacarpal phalangeal (MCP) joints. This is in contrast to your proximal interphalangeal joints (your PIP joints) or your distal interphalangeal joints (your DIP joints). I'll state PIP or DIP joints specifically when referring to techniques that do not involve the MCP joints.

Elbow: The olecranon process, that is, the pointy part of your elbow. To use a specific point like this, the elbow is usually quite flexed.

Open elbow: To create a broader contact, you can extend the elbow slightly so that the contact is not directly on the olecranon, but along the proximal ulna. This is a very distinct boney ridge. I may occasionally use the term *forearm* more generally to refer to this same contact point. Occasionally, you may use the fleshy part of the forearm when working near boney areas. I'll make a note of this in the instructions when necessary.

It's important to wear a short sleeve shirt whenever possible so that your elbows and forearms are exposed and you have maximum sensitivity to the structures you are working on.

As a general rule, when you want the massage to feel deeper or more penetrating, you'll use a small contact point. Why? Because you have the same force going through a smaller area, you are increasing the pressure (i.e., pounds per square inch). The opposite is also true. If someone is particularly sensitive, then use a broader contact so that the force is dispersed over a wider area.

You'll also want to aim to use the proximal contact points as often as possible during your massage. Your proximal joints are much more stable because of their wide surface areas. Stabilization of these joints makes use of larger muscle groups that are stronger and less likely to strain than smaller muscles of the forearm and hand. This is contrary to what you are accustomed to doing with Swedish massage, where there is a great deal of use of the hands, fingers, and thumbs.

A Little Anatomy

You've had training in anatomy, so I'm not going to do a comprehensive review in this book. However, you should be aware of the terminology that I use as you delve into the technique descriptions.

Instead of referring to the muscles in a very technical way using their anatomical names, I've taken more of an experiential approach to the descriptions. For example, instead of talking about the extensor carpi radialis longus and extensor digitorum, I simply refer to the group of muscles that they belong to as the extensors. Furthermore rather than refer to that group as the wrist extensors or finger extensors, I'll just call them the forearm extensors.

So although the anatomical terminology may not always be technically correct, you will have a clear sense for what muscles are being massaged and you will find that reading the technique descriptions will be much easier. This should help facilitate the learning process.

As you actually start to apply the techniques, another thing to keep in mind is that the body is in a very different orientation to what you are used to when you do table massage. That may throw you off a bit as you approach the body in this new position.

For example, when you have someone lying on a table with their arms to their side, the medial edge of the scapula is pretty much parallel to the spine and is easy to access. On the chair, however, because the shoulders are on an armrest, the shoulder joint is abducted and flexed. As a result, the inferior angle of the scapula moves laterally across the ribs and the edge of the scapula angles at about a 30 to 40 degree angle to the spine. As well, because the shoulder blades are strongly protracted they pull tightly against the ribs and the medial edge of the scapula becomes very difficult to palpate. They feel a body ridge (the ribs) that lies parallel to the spine where they would normally expect to find the edge of the scapula. As unlikely as it may seem, many therapists who are new to chair massage actually confuse the ribs that are superficial just lateral to the erector spinae with the medial edge of the scapula.

So as you begin to apply these techniques, be acutely aware of palpating the bony landmarks and the edges of the muscles in a very conscious way until you get accustomed to working with the body in this new orientation.

Below you'll find several illustrations showing the general anatomy overlaying pictures of a person in the massage chair so you can start to orient yourself to the body visually. I've labeled these diagrams with the anatomical terms that will be used in the technique descriptions.

[insert pictures; the idea is to have illustrations overlay photos to help practitioners working with the chair to identify bony landmarks through the clothing and in an orientation they are not accustomed to seeing]

The Techniques

1. Gentle circles

Position and body use

- Begin by standing to one side of your client to work on the opposite side of the back
- Don't bend forward from the waist. Take a nice wide lunge position to keep your back aligned

Performing the technique

- Using the heel of your hand, do gentle circles over the erector spinae
- Move your circles from the top of the back to the top the pelvis, overlapping the circles with each repetition
- If you find yourself stooping or bending to reach your client's back, widen your stance

Other tips

- Don't apply any significant pressure. This technique is not done to manipulate the muscles, but rather to simply give the person a chance to settle into the chair and relax. Think of this technique as a shirt massage, rather than a muscle massage
- Even though the heel of the hand is the contact point, let the entire hand rest comfortably on the back
- Make the circles large enough that the customer can feel a circular movement, but not so wide as to feel as if they are being groped

2. Trap squeeze

Position and body use

- Stand behind your client and drape your hands over your client's shoulders. The heel of your hand will rest on the back edge of the traps and your fingertips will rest on the front edge of the upper traps
- Keep your shoulders relaxed

Performing the technique

- Gently squeeze the muscle between the heel of your hand and your fingertips
- Begin the squeezes at the neck-shoulder junction and then shift laterally after each squeeze
- Near the neck, you'll find that you'll do the compression more between the heel of your thumb and your first two fingers. As you move lateral, it will be easier to use the whole heel of the hand (see photos to the right to see the orientation of the hands)

Other tips

- It may be useful to use a pincer palpation to find the exact edge of the muscle before performing the squeezes
- It is important that you are able to define the borders of the muscle. If your fingertips are placed to far in front of the anterior edge of the trapezius, you'll pull the skin taut against the front of the throat and your customer will feel as if they are being choked. If your fingers are too much on top of the trapezius, you'll end up pinching their skin
- Likewise, make sure that the heels of the hand are far enough down the back to catch the posterior border of the muscle
- Keep the thumbs tucked into the hand to prevent stress to those joints

Note: An alternative to the trap squeeze is performed by squeezing and then gently shaking the muscle back and forth several times with a loose easy movement while maintaining the squeeze

3. Butterfly

Position and body use

- Get into a lunge position behind your client
- Place the heels of your thumbs directly beside the spinous processes with the thumbs pointing straight up
- As you do this technique down the back, you'll need to move your back foot further away from the chair with each subsequent repetition to maintain a neutral alignment of your spine

Performing the technique

- With your elbows only slightly bent, slowly let your weight fall into your hands. Do this by lifting your front foot slightly off the floor
- Place the front foot back on the floor to slowly release the pressure
- Slide the hands down several inches and repeat the compression

Other tips

- Once you get a sense for transferring your weight through your arms, you no longer will need to lift the front leg
- Be sure to stabilize the elbows and shoulders so that no movement occurs in your arms
- Likewise be sure stabilize the trunk so that you neither extend nor flex your low back
- Keep your center of gravity low to prevent excessive flexion of the wrists
- If you get even the slightest discomfort in your wrist use the alternative Fist Compression technique outlined in the Accessory Techniques section of this book
- As with all compression techniques, you need to push into the body at a right angle. The upper back is usually too horizontal to maintain this perpendicular orientation as you let your weight fall forward. So you'll likely need to use the strength in your arm muscles to push downward for the first two or three compressions

4. Pisiform circles to the erectors

Position and body use

- Stand in a lunge behind your client and slightly off to one side
- If you are massaging the right side of the back, stand slightly to the left and use your right hand to perform the technique
- To find the starting position for the pisiform, place the pisiform bone of the right hand on the crest of the erector spinae, about one inch lateral to the spinous processes on the right side of your client's back
- Then move the skin and the material of the shirt medial and inferior so that the pisiform is sitting in the laminar groove
- By doing this, you have some additional slack in the skin so that you can perform the technique across the whole width of the muscle

Performing the technique

- Start at about the C7 level

- Stabilize your arm and your trunk
- Let your weight fall through the pisiform and allow it to slide upwards and outwards across the muscle
- Release the pressure but keep the contact as you bring the skin and shirt back to the starting position to complete the circle
- Repeat the circle several times in the one spot
- Lift and move the pisiform down the back a few inches and repeat the technique

Other tips

- The skin and shirt material must move with the hand throughout the movement. Do not glide over the material
- Don't lift the fingers or extend the wrist. Keep the palm facing the back and let your fingers relax completely
- Be careful not to do the movement with your arm and shoulder. Your trunk and arm are stabilized and you simply transfer your body weight by rocking your body back and forth in a small movement
- If you feel a strong strumming sensation under your hand, you are pushing directly across the muscle. To correct this, stand more behind your client and think of your pisiform moving up along the medial edge of the erector spinae rather than across. Your "circles" become tall ovals

5. Elbow compressions to the mid-back

Position and body use

- Stand behind and slightly to the side of your client
- Your hips are facing straight forward
- If you are massaging the right side of the back, your right leg comes forward beside your client and your left hip is directly behind your client's spine
- Use the elbow closest to your client, in this case the left elbow
- Don't flex the elbow sharply. Keep it relatively open or extended

Performing the technique

- Place the elbow in the laminar groove near C7, slowly let your weight fall forward into the elbow, hold and release
- Slide down a couple of inches to the next position and repeat the compression
- Once you reach the mid-back (around the bra line), shorten your lunge as you return your elbow towards the starting position
- For this second set of compressions place your elbow on the crest or belly of the erector spinae at the C7 level
- Perform a series of compressions down the crest of the erector spinae to the mid-back
- Repeat to the left side

Other tips

- It is extremely important that you move the back leg backwards slightly after each compression to maintain the neutral alignment of your spine
- Because your elbow is so close to the spinous processes, it is important that you shoulder is directly behind your elbow and that you direct your pressure anteriorly. If you are positioned on an oblique angle, your elbow will push into the spinous processes.
- To disperse your force, open up the elbow so that your weight is spread out along the ridge of the ulna. For a more penetrating technique, flex the elbow sharply and contact with the point of the elbow
- If using the point of the elbow, you may want to "cup" your elbow with your free hand to provide support and to prevent slipping until you feel comfortable with palpating the underlying structures with your elbow

6. Deltoid squeeze

Position and body use

- Kneel or squat beside your client facing their arm
- Interlace your fingers and place the heels of the hands on the edges of the deltoid muscle at the top of the arm
- Keep the heels of the hands aligned vertically along the edges of the muscle

Performing the technique

- Gently squeeze the edges of the deltoid between the heels of your hands and release
- Move down slightly and repeat
- Continue these squeezes down the length of the deltoid (approximately one third of the way down the upper arm)

Other tips

- Keep the elbows high if possible so that the forearms are parallel to the ground. This will allow you to use your chest muscles to generate force and will keep the heels of the hands aligned vertically along the edge of the deltoid muscle
- It is difficult to palpate the edges of the deltoid where it inserts into the humerus. Be sure not to go more than a third of the way down the arm or you'll end up pinching the skin and fat on the outside of the arm

7. Double arm squeeze

Position and body use

- Kneel or squat beside your client facing their arm

- Mold one hand to the biceps muscle. The fingers should be pointing away from you so that the heel of the hand is lined up vertically along the edge of the biceps. You thumb should lie along the anterior-inferior edge of the deltoid
- The other hand surrounds the triceps. The side of the index finger can be placed high up in the axilla
- Notice that there's a significant difference in height between the front hand and the back hand, with the bicep hand positioned somewhat lower

Performing the technique

- Squeeze the muscles between the heel of the hands and the flat surfaces of the fingers as you push your hands gently towards each other
- Release and slide downward slightly
- Repeat the sequence finishing at the elbow

Other tips

- The most significant action is the squeezing between the heel of the hand and the fingers. Push your hands together slightly so that your contact points stay on the edges of the muscle. Otherwise, your hands will tend to slide off the muscle, pinching the skin and fat on their arms. This is particularly important if your client has large upper arms
- Use the flat surfaces of your fingers rather than the fingertips, that is, your hand will be in a "V" shape rather than a "C" shape
- Be careful not to position yourself too close to your client. You'll tend to lift the arm upward and will not be able to generate any significant force as you try to push your hands towards each other
- Because of poor posture, your client's arms may tend to internally rotate – you'll see the palm facing backwards rather than facing the body. As a result, the biceps are against the body rather than being anterior as they should be if the arm is in a neutral position with the palm facing the body. Be aware of this so that you can grab the muscle itself rather than the skin and fat on the medial and lateral surfaces of the arm

8. Wrist flexor squeeze

Position and body use

- Kneel or squat beside your client and face forward in the same direction as your client
- Using the hand that is furthest from your client, take the wrist and lift the arm slightly away from the body

- Put the fingertips of your working hand in the cubital fossa (the hollow at the front of the elbow) and the heel of the hand just to the inside of the ulna

Performing the technique

- Squeeze the wrist flexor muscles between the heel of your hand and the tips of your fingers
- Release, slide downwards and repeat the squeeze
- Continue along the full length of the wrist flexors, stopping just above the wrist

Other tips

- Note that the muscles turn into tendons about two thirds of the way down the forearm. As you squeeze through the lower half of the forearm, you'll see the fingers curl
- Avoid squeezing the forearm bones by keeping your contact points on the edges of the flexors throughout the entire length of the forearm. You'll see a space between the palm of your hand and their arm as the muscles narrow

9. Wrist extensor squeeze

Position and body use

- Kneel or squat beside your client and face forward in the same direction as your client
- Hold your client's wrist with the hand that is closest to them
- Place the base of your thumb, that is, the head of your first metacarpal, in the hollow behind the elbow and the fingertips in the hollow at the front of the elbow

Performing the technique

- Squeeze the wrist extensor muscles between the base of your thumb and the tips of your fingers
- Release, slide downwards a small distance and repeat the squeeze
- Continue this pattern along the length of the extensors

Other tips

- The muscles become tendinous about one third of the way down the forearm. There is too little tissue to squeeze below that point
- Avoid squeezing the bones and be sure to have your contact points on the edge of the muscle
- Because this is a very small muscle group, you'll notice an open space between the palm of your hand and the muscle
- If your hand is positioned correctly, you'll notice that the thumb is oriented upwards, as if you are hitchhiking

10. Thumb compressions to the palm

Position and body use

- Stand in front your client, take their hand off the arm rest and supinate it, making sure their elbow remains supported by the arm rest
- Rest both sets of your fingers under the hand. Keep the fingers open or flat to provide a broad base of support
- Use the pads of the thumbs to do compressions along the sides of the metacarpal bones
- Reinforce the thumbs by placing one on top of the other

Performing the technique

- Follow the seven lines in the attached picture starting at the outside of the base of the small finger
- Do four compressions along each line starting proximal and working distal
- Press in gradually and release the pressure gradually
- On the outside edge of the metacarpal of the thumb, push the muscle to the center of the hand rather than compressing downward to avoid pressing directly on the metacarpal bone

Other tips

- These compressions are intended for the intrinsic muscles of the hand between the metacarpals
- Be careful not to press directly on either the carpal bones or the metacarpal bones

- Note that there are two lines of compressions between the metacarpals of the thumb and index finger. Line 5 follows the metacarpal of the index finger while Line 6 follows along the thumb

11. Shaking the metacarpals

Position and body use

- Remain in front of your client
- Grasp the head of the fifth metacarpal between the thumb and index finger of one hand and grasp the head of the fourth metacarpal with the other hand
- Be sure to grab just proximal to the knuckle
- Keep your feet together and position, keep your elbows straight and your shoulders directly above your client's hand

Performing the technique

- Push one metacarpal away as you pull the other toward you and then reverse the action
- Do this at a quick rate so that you are shaking the metacarpals back and forth
- Shift your hands over to the next metacarpals. Repeat with all metacarpals

Other tips

- The aim of this technique is to stretch the intrinsic muscles of the hand
- In order for your client to feel much sensation, you'll need to be vigorous with the movement
- Keep the elbows relatively straights so that the movement comes from the upper body rather than the elbows or wrists
- It may be more comfortable for both you and the client if you grab the metacarpals between the base of the thumb and fingers rather than the pad of the thumb
- Because there is so much movement in the thumb, don't try to force the range of movement between the first and second metacarpal

12. The "Inch worm"

Position and body use

- Place your client's hand loosely in yours as if you are shaking hands
- Use this hand to gently support your client's hand and extend their wrist
- With your other hand, place the side of your index finger underneath the base of the little finger

- Place the pad of the thumb on top of the finger while keeping your thumb in line with your client's finger as illustrated

Performing the technique

- Lift your thumb and place it distally a quarter inch
- Push the index finger upwards as it slides distally to meet the thumb (this places a small stretch on the underside of the finger)
- Repeat until you reach the tip of the finger
- Repeat for each finger

Other tips

- The thumb simply stabilizes the finger. Don't slide the thumb in a proximal direction as your finger slides or you'll pull the skin on top of the finger
- Be careful not to slide your index finger past your thumb or you may push your client's fingers into hyperextension, which may be uncomfortable
- Be sure to contact with the side of your index finger at the DIP joint and avoid using the pad of your finger
- Avoid pulling their finger upward and hyperextending your client's fingers at the metacarpal-phalangeal joint

13. Dorsal glide

Position and body use

- Put your fingers under your client's hand and rest the heels of your thumbs on the back of your client's hand

Performing the technique

- Glide the heels of your thumbs outward across the top of your client's hand in a way that resembles breaking a Popsicle
- Your fingers push gently into the hand and do not slide

Other tips

- Be careful not to use the thumbs themselves. This causes stress to the metacarpal phalangeal (MCP) joint of the thumb

14a. Cat paw

Position and body use

- Stand in front of your client with feet together

- Place the heel of your hands on top of the shoulders (the crest of the trapezius muscle) as close to the neck as possible

Performing the technique

- Push firmly down into the muscle with one hand directing the pressure to the opposite side of the pelvis
- Push firmly down into the muscle with the second hand
- As that second hand takes the slack out of the muscle the first hand lifts up.
- Move the first hand slightly lateral and repeat the compression
- Repeat this in a rhythmical way that resembles a cat pawing the floor. Work towards the edge of the shoulders with each subsequent compression

Other tips

- To ensure the compressions are done at a right angle to the trapezius muscle, the fingers should appear to make a V-position on your client's back
- Remember that the hands never lose contact with your client's shoulders. One hand is always applying pressure or else the movement begins to feel abrupt or punchy
- Stay on soft tissue and avoid pushing into either the clavicle or the acromion
- Be careful that the heels of the hands are not placed anterior to the anterior border of the traps or else your client will experience an uncomfortable pulling sensation to the musculature at the front of the neck

14b. Cat paw with squeeze

Position and body use

- Positioning is the same as the Cat Paw
- Make sure that the heels of the hands are on the crest of the muscle and let the fingers relax down the back

Performing the technique

- The movement is essentially the same the Cat Paw, but a squeezing action is introduced
- As you compress with the heel of the hand, use the pads of your fingers to pull the soft tissue up into the heel of your hand
- Grab as much of the upper-back muscles as possible
- Start close to the neck and work laterally

Other tips

- Don't think of this technique as a trap squeeze performed from the front of the chair. Rather it's a squeeze of the upper back muscles
- Notice in the illustration how the finger joints are extended so that the hand forms a V-shape rather than a C-shape. This allows you to grab more tissue and prevents you from pinching

15. Elbow compressions to the traps

Position and body use

- Stand in a lunge position facing your client and off to one side. Locate the v-shaped notch on the top edge of the shoulder, where your shoulder blade and collar bone meet (the acromioclavicular notch)
- The hand that is furthest away from your client's back forms a C-shape and rests on the shoulder, exposing the notch
- Place the elbow so that it is cupped within the "C" of your other hand. This is done to stabilize the elbow and prevent it from slipping off the crest of the muscle

Performing the technique

- Let your weight fall forward to gently compress the trapezius under your elbow
- Direct your pressure towards the opposite side of the pelvis
- Release your pressure, move the elbow and supporting hand medial along the crest of the traps and repeat the compression

Other tips

- Instead of using the point of the elbow, try opening up the elbow and using the edge of the ulna. It's a broader contact and it removes the possibility of slipping off the crest of the traps. When using your elbow in this way you do not need to cup it with your other hand
- If you face your client head on, your upper arm will bump against their head. To prevent this from happening, swing your back leg away from the chair so that you are at a bit of an angle to your client
- As an alternative, this technique can also be done standing behind your client or beside your client

16. Thumb compressions beside the edge of the scapula

Position and body use

- Stand behind and slightly to the side of your client in a lunge position

- Be sure to keep your thumbs lined up in a straight line with your forearms
- Locate the top corner (superior angle) of the scapula and place your reinforced thumbs below this point just medial to the edge of the shoulder blade

Performing the technique

- With your elbows slightly bent, let your body weight fall into your thumbs
- Slide your thumbs downwards a little and repeat the compression
- Repeat the sequence, stopping about two thirds of the way down the shoulder blade
- Do not push against the scapula itself, rather, direct the pressure in more of an anterior direction, into the tendons that attach to the shoulder blade

Other tips

- As with all compression techniques, if you are transferring your weight effectively there should be no movement in your body
- There is a tendency to let the palms lie flat on the back and this takes the thumbs out of alignment. Use your fingers as a tripod to keep your palms away from the body (as illustrated), or simply tuck the fingers in to make loose open fists
- If you have hypermobile thumb joints, use one of the alternative techniques that will be presented later to prevent undue stress to your thumb

17. C-scoops

Position and body use

- Stand beside your client facing forward and with your feet together
- Place your open hand (a C-shape) across the neck just below the base of the skull
- Place the fingertips and the thumb on the lateral edges of the extensor muscles
- To create some slack in the skin, move the skin downward slightly toward the front of the throat

Performing the technique

- From this starting position, lift the neck extensors up along the length of the neck and then away from the neck in a circular pattern, much like lifting a cat by the scruff of the neck
- Clamp the extensor muscles of the neck firmly as your hand moves up and away from the body. Be sure to move the skin with your fingers so that you don't slide over the skin.
- Release the pressure as you complete a circle to go back to the starting position

- Repeat several times, and then place the hand a little lower on the neck to repeat again

Other tips

- These movements should be big, round and rhythmical
- Emphasize pulling away from the neck (like picking up a cat) and don't push the neck forward into extension
- Be sure to use the tips of the fingers and thumb so that you can catch the edges of the extensors and put a little pull on them

18. Compressions to the base of the skull

Position and body use

- Get into a lunge, slightly to the side of your client. For example, if you are working on the right side, you'll stand to the right of your client with your right leg forward
- Place your reinforced thumbs just to the side of the spinous processes and just below the base of the skull
- Make sure the lunge is deep and the elbows are dropped so that the force is directed slightly upward
- Keep your thumbs in the same line as the forearm with one thumb directly on top of the other

Performing the technique

- Gently let the weight fall into the soft tissue below the base of the skull, hold the compression momentarily and release
- Repeat a number of times moving laterally across the skull
- Lift your thumbs to change positions and do not slide

Other tips

- This is typically a very tender area so apply the compression slowly and hold it momentarily before releasing
- Push into the soft tissue and not into the skull bone itself
- The base of the skull slopes downward slightly from the center. Don't do a line of compressions straight across or your end up pushing on the skull bone as you move laterally
- Compression techniques are done at right angles to the body. Since the head is round, you'll need to adjust your body position to maintain the 90-degree direction of force to the base of the skull. You can do this by swinging the back leg around to the outside with each subsequent compression

19. Thumb circles to the base of the skull

Position and body use

- Assume the same orientation and stance as you did with the thumb compressions
- To create some slack in the skin, move the skin downward and lateral before beginning the circles. This slack will allow you to make larger circles

Performing the technique

- Let you weight fall forward slightly as the thumb comes up toward the base of the skull in a circular motion
- Moving the skin and the hair with your thumb press upwards and outwards in a half circle
- As your thumb contacts the base of the skull relax the pressure and complete the circle making sure not to slide over the skin or hair
- Repeat this circular movement several times
- Lift the thumbs and reposition them laterally to do another set of circular kneading movements. Repeat this across the base of the skull

Other tips

- Lift your thumbs to change positions and do not slide over the skin or hair
- Again, the base of the skull angles downward as you move laterally. Be sure to position your thumbs correctly for each set
- Like the compressions, you'll need to adjust the direction of your force as you continue around the skull
- Avoid any sliding during the kneading movement. Move the skin and the hair with your thumbs

20. Percussion to the back (karate chops)

Position and body use

- Stand behind your client with one leg slightly in front of the other

Performing the technique

- Keeping your wrists relaxed, perform a chopping motion alternating hands and striking your client's back with the side of the hand
- Think of the hands as bouncing off your client's back rather than into their body
- Start on the top lateral edge of the upper trapezius with one hand on each side of the client's body. Move medially toward the shoulder/neck junction and then down the erector. You can

also do this with the hands close together working up and down each side of the back individually

Other tips

- Because this is a more aggressive technique, perform it over fleshy areas like the shoulders, mid-back, and along the erector spinae muscles
- If you have troubles with the coordination of alternating hands, pretend that you are brushing dirt off your hands
- Keep your back aligned as you perform the technique to various places on the back or shoulders
- To transition to the lower back while keeping your back straight, put one foot well behind the other and slowly lower onto the back knee as you do a one-leg lunge
- If you see your client's body shaking or vibrating, you are hitting them too heavily

21. Groove compression

Position and body use

- Stand behind and very slightly to one side of your client
- Place the heel of the hand in the laminar groove on the opposite side to which you're standing (i.e. if standing to the left of your partner, use your right hand on the right side of your client's back)

Performing the technique

- Directing your pressure in an anterior direction, let your weight fall into the heel of your hand then release the pressure
- Like all compression techniques, be sure that the force is directed at right angles to the back
- Lift the hand, move downward several inches and repeat
- Each time the hand moves down the back, the back leg shifts backwards to maintain good alignment of your back

Other tips

- This technique is designed to bow the erector spinae muscles to the side, but without pushing in a lateral direction. Because there is not enough room in the groove for the heel of your hand, when you push anteriorly the erector spinae will naturally be compressed and will shift laterally from under your hand
- The upper back is usually too horizontal to let your weight fall forward effectively, so you'll likely need to stand more to the side of the client with your shoulder and elbow flexed at 90 degrees

for the first two or three compressions. This allows you to use your chest muscles to stabilize your shoulder effectively. As you move down the back, you can maintain that relationship of the arm to the torso, or you can shift behind your partner and straighten your elbow, which will require less muscular effort

22. Feathering

Position and body use

- Stand behind your client

Performing the technique

- Using your whole hand, lightly stroke straight down the entire back several times in a slow soothing manner
- Be sure to include the neck and shoulders, and stroke all the way to the pelvis

Other tips

- You can use both hands simultaneously or alternate hands