MARK PERREN-JONES SPA TRAINING ACADEMY

Relaxation Massage

Professional Course Manual & Workbook

Purposeful touch • connected flow • client-centred care

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NCBTMB Approved Continuing Education Provider #1805

ISLA VERDE SPA METHOD

WELCOME

A better relaxation massage begins with intention

Relaxation massage is purposeful work. It is not a collection of random strokes, and it does not have to be feather-light. The client should feel comfortable, supported and listened to while you create a calm rhythm, meaningful contact and a coherent full-body experience.

This manual is designed to be used alongside the course demonstrations. The written sequence reinforces the videos; it does not replace watching the exact hand placement, draping and transitions being taught.

THE ISLA VERDE STANDARD

Every stroke should feel as though it belongs. Pressure is adapted to the individual, transitions are unhurried, and the massage leaves the client feeling restored, emotionally cared for and physically comfortable.

How to use this workbook

- Read the relevant section before watching the matching video lesson.
- Practise one region at a time before attempting the full sequence.
- Ask for specific feedback about pressure, rhythm, temperature, draping and transitions.
- Complete the reflection pages so that each practice session has a clear purpose.

SCOPE AND SAFETY

Educational massage instruction is not authorization to diagnose or treat medical conditions. Follow local law, your training and workplace policies. Obtain ongoing consent and postpone, modify or refer when indicated.

COURSE MAP

Contents

01	Foundations of purposeful relaxation massage	**4**
02	Client experience, treatment room and session planning	**8**
03	Body mechanics, core strokes and connected flow	**13**
04	Regional application and the Isla Verde Spa sequence	**18**
05	Safety, products, documentation and professional practice	**25**
A	Workbook activities and knowledge check	**30**
B	Anatomy reference	**32**

Learning outcomes

By the end of this course, you should be able to:	
Explain	The difference between purposeful relaxation massage and focused deep tissue work.
Prepare	A comfortable treatment environment and a clear, consent-based session plan.
Perform	Connected gliding, kneading and broad-contact techniques with efficient body mechanics.
Deliver	The Isla Verde Spa full-body sequence with secure draping and smooth transitions.
Decide	When to proceed, modify, postpone or refer, and document the session appropriately.

SECTION 01

The Foundations of Relaxation Massage

Purposeful contact, continuous rhythm and client comfort are the defining priorities.

01 • FOUNDATIONS

Relaxation is not the absence of technique

A great relaxation massage is technically sound, emotionally reassuring and deliberately paced. It engages muscle and fascia comfortably without turning the session into a painful search for problem areas.

The central misconception

Relaxation massage is sometimes treated as a superficial ‘skin polish.’ Very light touch may be ideal for one client and distracting or ticklish for another. The correct pressure is the pressure that feels safe, soothing and useful to the person on the table.

Principle	What it looks like in practice
Intentional pressure	Begin gently, establish broad contact, then adjust with permission and feedback.
Connected flow	Link movements; avoid abrupt lifts, jerky stops and unnecessary repositioning.
Comfort	Attend to bolsters, warmth, breathing, draping and stated preferences.
Unhurried pace	Allow the stroke and the transition enough time; do not rush to ‘cover’ the body.
Individuality	Respect requests for silence, lighter or firmer pressure, and omitted regions.

PRESSURE CHECK

Ask: ‘Would you like the pressure lighter, firmer or about the same?’ Also notice guarding, flinching, held breath or withdrawal. These are cues to check in and adjust.

01 • FOUNDATIONS

What clients are really seeking

Most clients are not judging how many techniques you performed. They are responding to whether the massage felt safe, skilful, connected and tailored to them.

Clients value	Your practical response
Relief from physical tension	Use comfortable engagement, not force. Let tissue response and feedback guide you.
Mental quiet	Reduce unnecessary conversation, rushing and abrupt changes.
A sense of being cared for	Prepare the room, explain transitions and remember individual preferences.
Consistent quality	Use a dependable framework while adapting pressure, pace and included areas.
Confidence and professionalism	Communicate clearly, drape securely and stay within your scope.

The gold standard

- Relaxed, but never ignored or left wondering what happens next.
- Comfortably worked, without pain being used as proof that the massage was effective.
- Physically lighter and emotionally settled, with time to return gradually at the end.
- Confident that the therapist listened and adjusted the session to them.

Reflection

What makes a massage feel connected rather than mechanical? Record two changes you will make to your pacing or transitions.

01 • FOUNDATIONS

Presence changes the entire massage

Technique matters, but a distracted therapist can make excellent technique feel impersonal. Presence means paying attention to the client’s breathing, muscular response, comfort and nonverbal cues while remaining calm yourself.

Before contact

- Pause. Settle your own breathing and posture.
- Know the next region and transition before you begin.
- Explain what is needed without overloading the client with information.

During the massage

- Keep at least one hand in reassuring contact when practical during transitions.
- Let your hands mould rather than grip.
- Check in briefly when you change pressure, position or work near a sensitive area.

At the end

- Restore full coverage and finish with broad settled contact if welcome.
- Pause before speaking; allow the client to orient themselves.
- Give the client time to sit and stand without rushing.

COURSE PRINCIPLE

The client should not feel that you are performing a routine on them. They should feel that the routine is being adapted for them.

SECTION 02

Creating the Treatment Experience

Client comfort begins before the first stroke.

02 • CLIENT EXPERIENCE

Design the room around comfort

Ambience is not decoration. It is the collection of practical details that allows a client to stop monitoring the room and begin relaxing.

Element	Professional standard
Table and supports	Stable height for your body mechanics; face cradle and bolsters adjusted for the client.
Temperature and linens	Clean, secure linens; manageable warmth; extra care when sensation is reduced.
Sound and lighting	Ask about music and room preferences. Not every client wants darkness or silence.
Scent	Optional. Confirm preference and sensitivity; always make an unscented session easy to request.
Massage medium	Enough glide for flowing work without losing control; confirm ingredients and allergies.
Timing	Include intake, position changes, a quiet ending, cleaning and notes.
Therapist presence	No avoidable distractions. Explain what happens next and maintain boundaries.

PRACTICE CHECK

Lie on your own treatment table using the supports you normally provide. Notice the face cradle, neck angle, lumbar comfort, ankle support and temperature. Record one change before your next session.

02 • CLIENT EXPERIENCE

Intake, consent and a flexible plan

A smooth session begins with a brief, focused conversation. Ask enough to work safely and tailor the experience, then turn the information into a clear plan.

Ask before the session

- What would you like from today’s massage: general relaxation, attention to a particular region, or both?
- Are there any new symptoms, recent injuries, procedures, relevant conditions, medications, allergies or skin concerns?
- What pressure, position, music, temperature and areas to avoid do you prefer?
- Is any proposed work near a sensitive area welcome? Explain the location, positioning and draping first.

ONGOING CONSENT

A client may ask you to stop, change pressure or omit an area at any time. Consent to begin the massage is not blanket consent to every technique or region.

Simple planning sequence

1. Confirm the client’s objective and important safety information.
2. Agree on included and excluded regions, pressure and positioning.
3. Choose a realistic sequence for the available time.
4. Explain position changes or unfamiliar elements.
5. Adapt again during the session when feedback or tissue response changes.

02 • CLIENT EXPERIENCE

Draping, positioning and transitions

Secure draping is part of the technique. If the client is worried about exposure, cold or how they will turn over, the nervous system cannot fully settle.

Draping standards

- Keep the client covered; expose only the area being worked.
- Secure the drape before applying massage medium or beginning a long stroke.
- Explain work near the gluteal, chest or upper thigh region and obtain appropriate explicit consent.
- Follow local regulations, professional standards and workplace policies.

Position changes

- Explain a turn from prone to supine before changing the drape.
- Maintain coverage and allow the client to reposition independently where appropriate.
- Recheck the face cradle, head support, bolster, temperature and comfort after the turn.

SMOOTH TRANSITION
Decide where the sheet, bolster and your hands will go before you ask the client to move. Organisation creates confidence and prevents the transition from breaking the mood.

Write the exact words you will use to explain the prone-to-supine turn.

02 • CLIENT EXPERIENCE

Session planning worksheet

Planning prompt	Student notes
Client’s stated objective	
Relevant health and safety considerations	
Included and excluded regions	
Pressure, pace and positioning preferences	
Product choice and allergies/sensitivities	
Modifications or reasons to postpone/refer	
Planned opening, turn and closing	
How success will be evaluated	

KEEP THE PLAN FLEXIBLE

A sequence provides structure, not permission to stop listening. The client’s comfort, consent and response always take priority over completing every step.

SECTION 03

Body Mechanics, Strokes & Flow

A relaxed client needs a therapist who can move with stability, ease and control.

03 • TECHNIQUE

Body mechanics that protect your career

Smooth pressure should come from a stable stance and controlled weight transfer—not constant effort from your hands, thumbs and shoulders.

Principle	Application
Stable stance	Feet comfortably apart, knees soft; change stance when the stroke changes direction.
Weight transfer	Move through the legs and torso to create an even glide.
Soft hands	Let palms and fingers mould to the client instead of gripping or clawing.
Joint alignment	Keep wrists near neutral; avoid prolonged thumb loading and extreme shoulder reach.
Table height	Set for both client comfort and your neutral posture; adapt technique when needed.
Tool choice	Use palms and broad forearm contact where appropriate. Concentrated elbow pressure is not a defining relaxation technique.

Quick self-check

- Are your shoulders relaxed and away from your ears?
- Can you breathe comfortably throughout the stroke?
- Is the movement coming from your legs and torso?
- Could you reduce hand effort by changing stance, table height or contact surface?

WORK SMARTER

If your thumb, wrist or shoulder is straining, the client is not benefiting from your sacrifice. Change the tool, angle, stance or technique.

03 • TECHNIQUE

The core relaxation massage toolkit

Technique	Purpose	Key caution
Broad introductory contact	Establish connection and let the client settle.	Explain contact; confirm it is welcome.
Effleurage / general glides	Create rhythm, distribute medium and integrate regions.	Avoid abrupt pressure changes and excess glide.
Kneading / petrissage	Comfortably engage muscle while maintaining cadence.	Do not pinch, grip with fingertips or overwork tenderness.
Scissor and butterfly strokes	Provide broad, flowing coverage over suitable regions.	Follow contours and secure the drape.
Compression and gentle rocking	Offer a grounding transition when the client enjoys it.	Avoid force, acute injury and unstable joints.
Broad forearm glides	Reduce hand strain and offer even contact on larger muscles.	Avoid spine, bony landmarks, knee crease and neck vessels.
Face, scalp, hands and feet	Add the distinctive finishing detail of a spa sequence.	Ask permission; check products, skin issues and ticklishness.

REMEMBER

Relaxation work can be meaningful and moderately firm without becoming painful. Depth is never the target; comfort and response determine the pressure.

03 • TECHNIQUE

How to make the massage flow

Flow is not simply moving slowly. It is the feeling that every technique prepares for the next one and every region remains part of one complete treatment.

A reliable stroke progression

1. Begin with broad, settled contact.
2. Warm and engage the region with comfortable general strokes.
3. Use more localised work only when requested and appropriate.
4. Return to broad integrating strokes before leaving the region.
5. Re-cover securely and transition without rushing.

Common flow breakers

Flow breaker	Better choice
Hands repeatedly leaving the client	Plan product, drape and position before beginning the region.
Sudden changes in pressure or speed	Build and release pressure gradually.
Too many techniques	Choose fewer strokes and perform them with confidence and continuity.
Rushing to complete every body area	Prioritise quality and adapt the sequence to the time available.
Mechanical repetition	Observe response and vary duration, pressure and focus appropriately.

Which transition feels least fluid? Describe how you will practise it three times.

03 • TECHNIQUE

Technique practice record

Practice focus	Your notes
Technique practised	
Region and position	
Pressure used	
Client feedback	
Your stance and body mechanics	
Quality of rhythm and transitions	
One change for the next practice	

Partner feedback prompts

- Did the pressure feel consistent and comfortable?
- Did any technique feel ticklish, sharp, rushed or disconnected?
- Could you feel when one region or stroke ended and the next began?
- Did the draping and position changes feel secure?
- Which part of the practice felt most professional?

SECTION 04

Regional Application & The Isla Verde Sequence

Keep each region connected to the massage as a whole.

04 • REGIONAL APPLICATION

Posterior legs and feet

The legs introduce broad movement and set the pace for the rest of the body. Work one leg at a time with secure draping, then re-cover before changing sides.

Suggested progression

1. Begin with butterfly strokes and an appropriate amount of massage medium.
2. Use long general glides through the lower and upper leg.
3. Add comfortable kneading and the hand-over-hand strokes shown in the course.
4. Where appropriate, use broad forearm contact over suitable muscle—not the knee crease or bony structures.
5. Treat the lateral thigh comfortably rather than driving pressure into the IT band.
6. Finish with integrated long strokes and brief ankle or foot contact.

SAFETY FOCUS

Do not massage over new unexplained unilateral calf warmth, tenderness or swelling. Stop and refer for urgent medical assessment.

Record your opening stroke, two connecting strokes and closing stroke for the posterior leg.

04 • REGIONAL APPLICATION

Back and shoulders

The back is where many therapists begin chasing tension. In this course, the priority is broad, confident work that relaxes without losing technical purpose.

Suggested progression

1. Secure the drape and introduce broad strokes with massage medium.
2. Use scissor strokes, comfortable circles and long glides between the lumbar region and shoulders.
3. Work around the spine, never directly into the spinous processes.
4. Use broad forearm contact when appropriate; omit forceful, concentrated elbow work.
5. Add comfortable work around the shoulder blade and upper shoulders within an easy range.
6. Return to long two-hand strokes to reconnect the entire back before re-covering.

Watch for	Response
Guarding or held breath	Reduce pressure, slow down and ask for feedback.
Sharp, burning, electric or numb sensation	Stop that technique and reassess.
Shoulder discomfort in prone position	Modify arm position or add support.
Your own wrist or shoulder strain	Change stance, table height or contact surface.

04 • REGIONAL APPLICATION

Neck, face and scalp

This section can become the most memorable part of a relaxation massage when contact is gentle, unhurried and clearly consented to.

Neck and shoulders

- Support the head and work through the posterior and lateral neck with comfortable contact.
- Keep assisted movement small, slow and pain-free.
- Avoid deep pressure over the anterior neck and vascular structures.

Face

- Confirm permission and check products, makeup, skin concerns and recent procedures.
- Glide from the centre of the forehead toward the hairline and temples.
- Use soft, controlled contact over cheeks and jawline without dragging the skin.

Scalp

- Ask about hair products, extensions, tenderness and preferred pressure.
- Use relaxed fingertips and avoid scratching or pulling.

CLIENT CHOICE
Ask before placing a towel near or over the eyes and ears. Small details that one client loves may feel uncomfortable or claustrophobic to another.

04 • REGIONAL APPLICATION

Arms, hands, anterior legs and feet

These regions provide an opportunity to restore full-body balance before the closing. Keep the draping precise and the stroke progression familiar.

Region	Relaxation-focused approach	Important boundary
Arms	Butterfly strokes, broad glides, comfortable circles and light kneading.	Protect irritated tendons and sensitive nerve areas.
Hands	Palm work, gentle thumb contact, back-of-hand glides and controlled finger movements.	Ask about arthritis, injury and ticklishness.
Anterior legs	Long glides and comfortable circles over muscle; integrate from ankle toward thigh.	Secure draping; work around—not on—sensitive knee structures.
Feet and toes	Gentle squeezing, gliding and comfortable toe movements.	Confirm consent and avoid painful or vulnerable joints and skin.

Finishing the body

- Return to broad strokes before leaving each region.
- Re-cover without snapping or tugging the sheet.
- Keep your pace consistent as the massage nears completion.
- Avoid suddenly becoming faster because time is running short; simplify instead.

Which supine region needs the most practice, and what specifically will you improve?

04 • ISLA VERDE SPA SEQUENCE

Prone: grounding and posterior body

Use this as the course framework. Every step remains optional according to intake, consent, comfort and time.

1. Grounding start. Establish agreed contact over the drape between the shoulders and lower back. Use slow movements toward the legs and feet; confirm comfort.
2. Feet. With permission, work each foot using comfortable broad contact and the gentle techniques demonstrated in the course.
3. Posterior legs. Drape one leg securely. Use butterfly strokes, general glides, kneading and hand-over-hand strokes. Add broad forearm contact only where appropriate. Finish with integrated strokes and brief ankle/foot contact; re-cover and repeat.
4. Back and shoulders. Secure the drape. Use broad strokes, scissor movements, comfortable circles and long glides. Work around the spine; keep forearm work broad. Add gentle shoulder-blade and upper-shoulder work.
5. Back closure. Return to long connected strokes over the back and shoulders. Finish with broad circular contact and replace the drape before the turn.

THE TURN
Explain the change to supine, organise the sheet and bolster, maintain coverage, and recheck comfort once the client is settled.

Where will your hands, sheet and bolster be during the turn? Write your plan.

04 • ISLA VERDE SPA SEQUENCE

Supine: neck, face, arms and anterior legs

6. Neck and shoulders. Use gentle contact across the shoulders and posterior/lateral neck. Support the head and keep any assisted movement small and comfortable.
7. Face and scalp. With consent, work from the central forehead toward the hairline and temples. Add comfortable cheek, jaw and scalp contact. Ask before placing a towel near the eyes or ears.
8. Arms and hands. Expose one arm securely. Use butterfly strokes, general glides and comfortable circles. Massage palm, back of hand and fingers; re-cover and repeat.
9. Anterior legs. Drape one leg securely. Use butterfly and broad gliding strokes with comfortable circles over muscle. Work carefully around the knee; return to long strokes, re-cover and repeat.
10. Feet and toes. With permission, use gentle squeezing, gliding and comfortable toe movements. Finish with light strokes toward the feet.
11. Final grounding. Restore full coverage. If welcome, use broad settled contact over the drape. Pause, allow the client to orient, and give them time to rise.

SEQUENCE RULE

This sequence is a dependable framework, not a mandate to perform every region. Adapt pressure, techniques, duration, position and included areas to the individual client.

SECTION 05

Safety & Professional Practice

A gentle massage is not automatically an appropriate massage.

05 • SAFETY

Contraindications and red flags

Safety decisions require individual assessment. Do not diagnose the cause of symptoms. Explain what you observed, record your decision and refer according to your training and local protocols.

Decision	Examples and response
Urgent medical assessment / no massage	Chest pain, new severe breathing difficulty, stroke signs, or unexplained one-sided calf warmth and swelling. Stop and help the client seek urgent care.
Postpone the session	Fever, contagious illness, intoxication, vomiting/diarrhoea, or an unstable acute condition.
Avoid the local area	Open wound, acute local skin infection, burn, unhealed injury, active inflammation or painful unexplained lump.
Modify or seek guidance	Pregnancy, cancer treatment, anticoagulants, osteoporosis, neuropathy, reduced sensation, complex illness or recent procedure may require adapted technique, position or healthcare input.

RED FLAG EXAMPLE

A client arrives with new warmth, tenderness and swelling in one calf after a long journey. Do not massage the leg. Stop and refer for urgent medical assessment.

How would you explain and document the decision in the example above?

05 • PRODUCTS

Massage mediums and optional scent

Choose products for safe skin contact and controlled glide. Aromatherapy is optional—not a requirement for an excellent relaxation massage.

Medium	Practical consideration
Oil	Supports sustained flowing strokes. Use only what is needed and confirm ingredients and allergies.
Lotion	Lighter feel and easier cleanup, but may absorb more quickly.
Cream	Often provides more control and less slip; choose according to technique and preference.
Unscented option	Offer routinely for clients who dislike fragrance or report sensitivity.

Product safety

- Ask about allergies, sensitivities, skin concerns and scent preferences.
- Follow product labels, dilution guidance and infection-control procedures.
- Stop product use if irritation or respiratory discomfort occurs.
- Clean oily linens according to laundering and dryer fire-safety guidance.

05 • PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

Documentation and aftercare

Notes should show the client’s goal, the agreed plan, relevant modifications and how the client responded. Keep records secure under applicable privacy requirements.

Document	Include
Intake and goal	The client’s own description of why they came and relevant safety information.
Consent and plan	Agreed regions, pressure, position, areas to avoid and modifications.
Session	Regions and major techniques performed, product used and unusual feedback.
Response	Client comments, unexpected sensations and any reason to stop or adapt.
Follow-up	Information or referral provided within scope and future-session considerations.

Aftercare

- Allow time to sit and stand comfortably before leaving.
- Offer simple suggestions within scope, based on the client’s experience and preferences.
- Avoid claims about ‘flushing toxins,’ mandatory soreness or guaranteed medical outcomes.
- Recommend appropriate assessment for unexpected or worsening symptoms.

PROFESSIONAL LANGUAGE

Describe the massage honestly: relaxation, comfort, reduced muscular tension and a sense of wellbeing. Do not turn a positive experience into an unsupported medical promise.

05 • PRACTICE RECORD

Client session reflection

Prompt	Notes
What was the client’s goal?	
Which regions and techniques were included?	
How did you maintain flow and secure draping?	
What did the client say about pressure and comfort?	
What modifications were made and why?	
How were your body mechanics?	
What would you change next time?	

REFLECT WITH PURPOSE

A useful reflection names one successful behaviour and one specific adjustment. ‘Practise more’ is vague; ‘slow the transition from kneading to long glides on the back’ gives you a clear next step.

APPENDIX A

Final knowledge check

Answer in your own words. Refer back to the manual and course demonstrations where needed.

1. How can relaxation massage be purposeful without becoming deep tissue work?
2. Name four details that improve the treatment environment.
3. What question can you use to check pressure without leading the client?
4. Describe two ways to protect your wrists and shoulders.
5. What makes a transition feel connected rather than mechanical?
6. Describe the prone-to-supine turn with appropriate draping.
7. What would lead you to stop, postpone, modify or refer?
8. Name the key regions in the Isla Verde Spa sequence.
9. Give two valid reasons to omit a region from the routine.
10. What information belongs in the client record?

Key points to review after completing the questions

APPENDIX A

Personal development plan

Choose a small number of improvements that will make the greatest difference to your clients and your own body.

Skill to improve	Why it matters	Practice action	Review date

My treatment philosophy

In three or four sentences, describe what you want clients to feel during and after your relaxation massage.

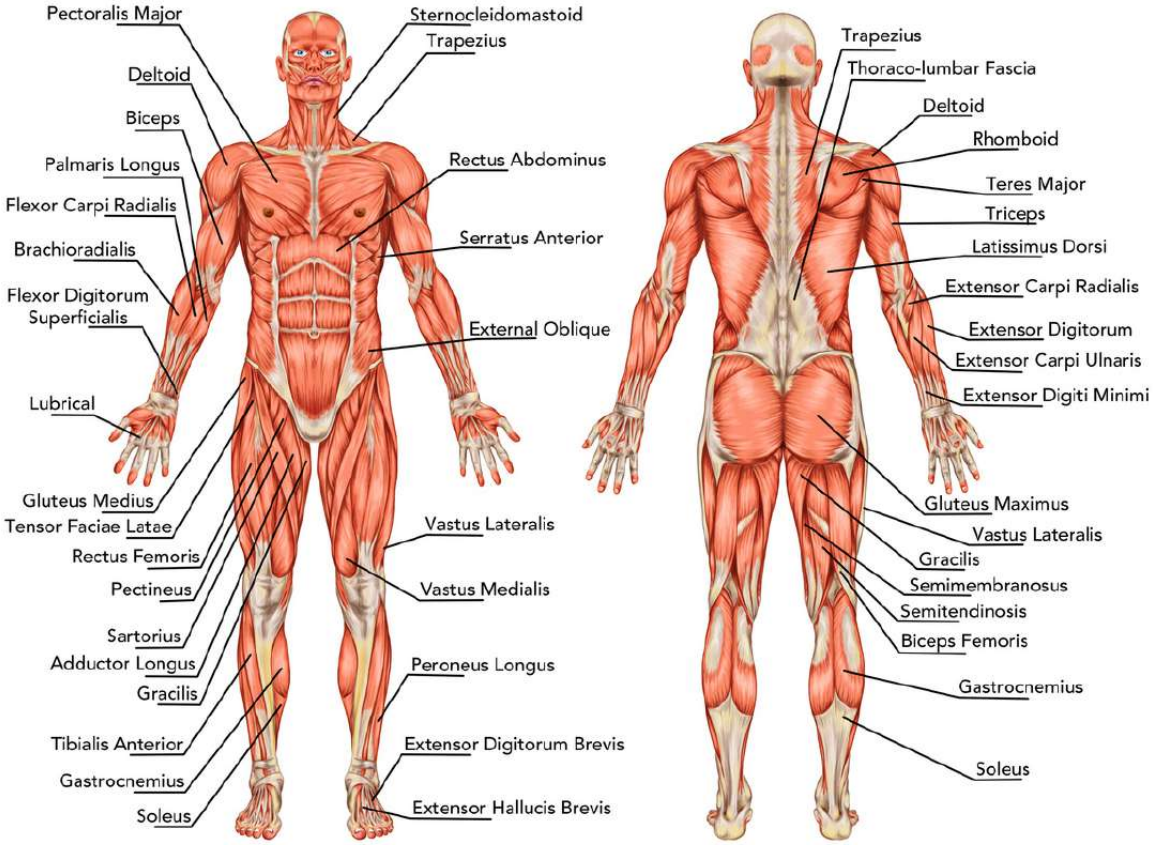
A FINAL REMINDER

Your best work will not come from memorising the greatest number of strokes. It will come from mastering comfortable pressure, seamless transitions, safe decisions and genuine attention.

APPENDIX B

Muscular anatomy reference

Use this diagram as a general orientation reference. Anatomy knowledge supports safe hand placement, but it does not determine treatment depth or replace consent.



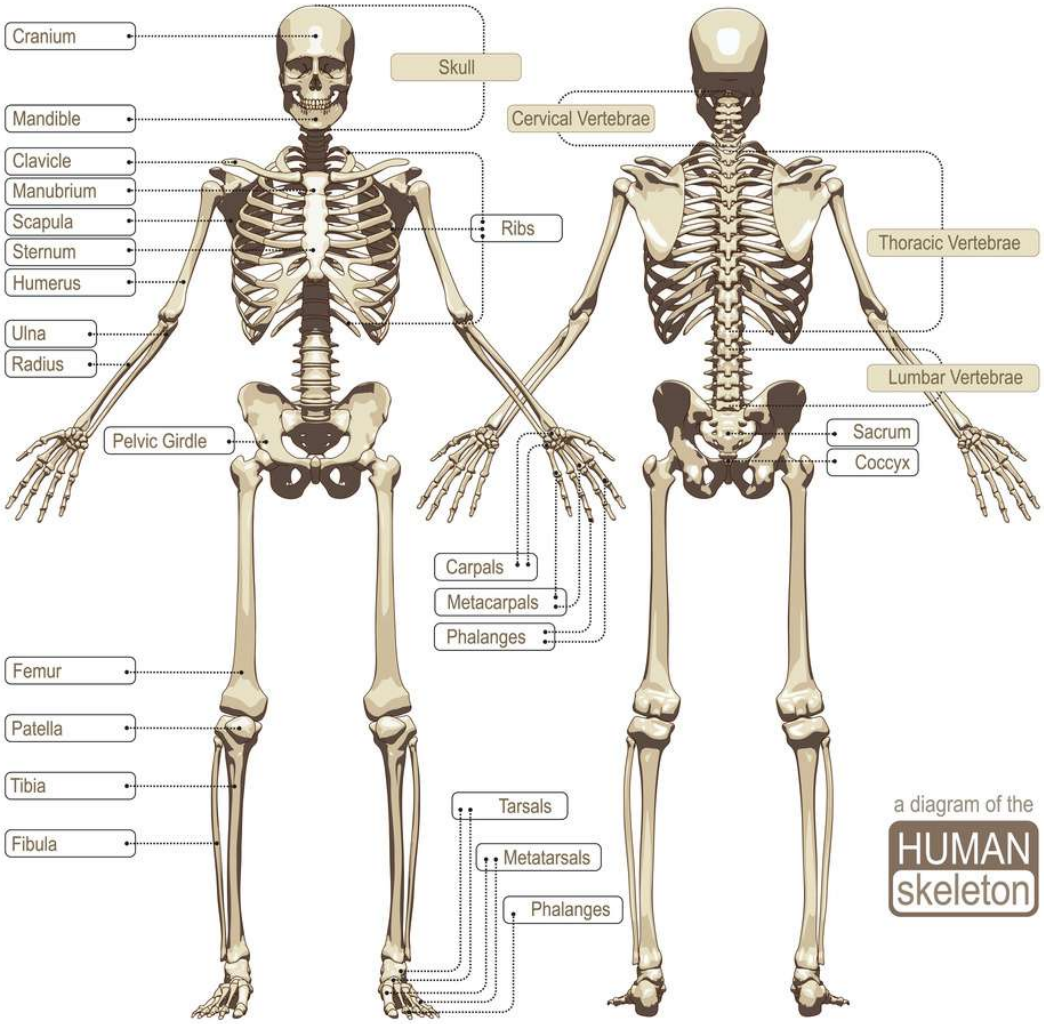
STUDY PROMPT

Identify the major muscle groups contacted during the posterior leg, back, shoulder, arm and anterior leg portions of the sequence.

APPENDIX B

Skeletal landmarks reference

Bony landmarks guide positioning and remind you where broad pressure must be reduced or redirected onto appropriate muscular tissue.



STUDY PROMPT

Locate the spine, scapula, sacrum, patella, malleoli and other landmarks that require thoughtful pressure and positioning.

THE ISLA VERDE STANDARD

Comfortable. Connected. Purposeful.

The best relaxation massage is the one your client experiences as safe, skilful and genuinely responsive to their needs.

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