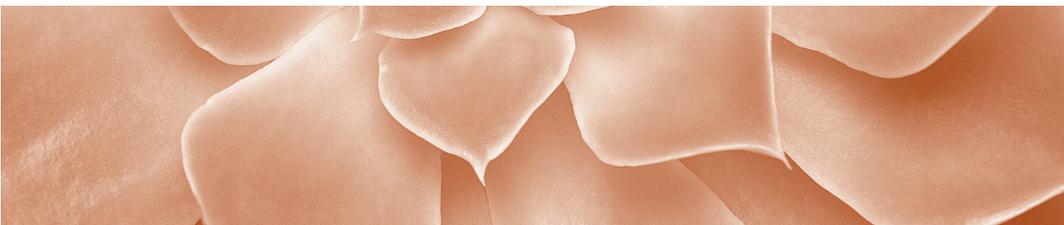


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# Your Massage & Bodywork Career

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# welcome

to the massage profession

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**Y**ou have taken the bold first step on a rewarding journey toward a new career. Soon you will be enrolled in school and, before you know it, your training program will be over and you will choose the environment in which you want to work. Associated Bodywork & Massage Professionals (ABMP) created this guide to help you start your massage training on the right foot. It aims to give you a general overview of massage, provide perspective on different massage careers, and help you prepare for some of the unique challenges of massage school. This understanding will help you focus on skills and concepts most applicable to your goals. When your classes start, put this guide away and focus on learning massage theory and techniques. As graduation approaches, return to this guide to help you evaluate your career path in light of your new level of understanding.

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**M**assage is relaxing to receive and has many health-promoting benefits. First, circulation of blood and lymph are stimulated during a session, which supports nutrient and waste exchange in the body's tissues and supports natural detoxification. Clients tend to breathe deeply during a session, which helps the body get more oxygen to its tissues. Massage lengthens chronically shortened muscles, creating more muscular balance in the body and supporting free movement.

Specific techniques can be used to decrease pain and other symptoms caused by repetitive activities, sports injuries, or diseases and medical conditions. Massage soothes the nervous system to decrease stress and relieves the symptoms of a number of stress-related conditions. An accepted part of many physical rehabilitation programs, massage has proven benefits for conditions like arthritis, carpal tunnel syndrome, headache, low-back pain, and neck pain. ■

# approaches

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## to massage

**M**assage is a healthcare profession where structured, professional touch is used to achieve a broad range of therapeutic goals. Historical references to massage have been left by cultures around the globe and date back to the oldest civilizations (including Egypt, China, and India). For example, anointing another person by rubbing aromatic oil into the skin was used historically by many cultures to remove “evil” influences that potentially caused disease. Massage is a natural and instinctive method for relieving pain. When the body is in pain or injured, it is common for a person to place pressure on the area or hold it with his or her own hand.

Today massage takes many forms and is usually tailored to fit the needs of each individual client. For example, sports massage was developed as a way to help athletes warm up for an event, recover more readily after training, or address a sports-related injury. This type of massage is generally different than pregnancy massage, which aims to relax and nurture the expectant mother.

Massage techniques have continued to evolve all over the world but are often classified as either Western or Eastern systems. Some modern developments in massage and bodywork are fusions of Eastern and Western methods. Each school will approach massage and bodywork differently.

Some schools focus on Western modalities only, others on Eastern modalities only, and some will teach a little of both. In any case, it is helpful for the prospective massage student to understand something of both systems.

### Western Approaches to Massage and Bodywork

In the nineteenth century, Per Henrik Ling noticed that recurring one-sided actions performed while he practiced fencing resulted in muscular pain and a chronic elbow condition. To offset his condition, Ling studied anatomy and physiology and developed a method called Swedish Gymnastics. Swedish Gymnastics is a form of movement therapy that uses *active*, *passive*, and *resisted* movements to increase a patient’s freedom of movement, balance the musculature, and strengthen the body.

A short time later, in Holland, Dr. Johann Mezger used the French terms *effleurage* (stroking), *petrissage* (kneading), *friction*





(rubbing), and *tapotement* (tapping) to describe broad massage techniques. In the early 1900s, proponents of Swedish Gymnastics adopted Mezger's massage terminology and soon a combination of active, passive, and resisted movements, along with effleurage, petrissage, friction, and tapotement, came to be called Swedish massage. In America, these techniques were closely intertwined with the natural medicine movement and individuals who studied the body-mind connection.

Throughout the twentieth century, ideas about massage continued to advance and techniques and modalities like connective tissue massage, manual lymphatic drainage, neuromuscular therapy, and structural integration expanded the ways to address chronic tension and postural holding patterns.

Massage gained recognition and prominence, due in part to the awareness generated at the Esalen Institute, which was established in 1962 in Big Sur, California, with the goal of exploring human potential. Spiritual practices like meditation, Buddhism, and yoga were taught in seminars side-by-side with massage and bodywork. Encounter groups encouraged people to explore their feelings and models of communication. This movement promoted the idea that massage is an important part of a healthy lifestyle.

Massage therapy continues to progress and is currently supported by the work of many researchers, including Dr. Tiffany Field at the Touch Research Institute at the University of Miami School of Medicine. Research has validated the many benefits of massage and consumers now seek out massage for a wide range of conditions. The boom in the spa industry has provided a new environment where consumers receive massage. Currently, spas are the largest employer of massage therapists and massage is the most requested service at spas.

In addition to Swedish massage, often called relaxation massage, there are a number of Western massage and bodywork modalities, including:

**Deep Tissue.** Deep tissue is a general term for a large number of techniques or modalities that address the deeper muscular structures and fascia (connective tissue) of the body. The strokes are usually applied slowly over specific areas of the body.

A wide variety of massage and bodywork modalities are discussed on ABMP's public education website [www.massagetherapy.com](http://www.massagetherapy.com).

**Hellerwork.** Developed by Joseph Heller in the 1970s, Hellerwork builds on Ida Rolf's ideas of structural integration. Heller integrated structural bodywork with movement education and dialogue. His aim was to reconnect body, mind, and spirit so that people could experience new options, both emotionally and physically, and come into natural alignment and balance.

**Manual Lymphatic Drainage.** Emil and Estrid Vodder, Danish physical therapists, developed Manual Lymphatic Drainage (MLD) in the 1930s. Using light, rhythmic strokes, MLD stimulates lymph flow and fluid movement. It is used for many different conditions including inflammation, lymphedema, and circulatory disturbances.

**Movement Modalities.** Feldenkrais Method, Alexander Technique, and Trager Bodywork are types of movement modalities. These systems work to achieve body awareness, balance, greater coordination, flexibility, and decreased muscle tension through a variety of techniques.

**Myofascial Release.** Developed in the 1970s by John Barnes, a physical therapist, this system aims to affect the myofascia of the body. *Myo* means muscle and *fascia* is a sheet-like connective tissue that wraps muscles and organs. Myofascial approaches are sometimes called soft-tissue manipulation, deep tissue, or connective tissue massage.

**Neuromuscular Therapy.** The methods of bodywork that use the interaction between the nervous system and muscles to facilitate a change in muscular holding patterns are forms of neuromuscular therapy. Some neuromuscular-based modalities include trigger point therapy, proprioceptive neuromuscular facilitation (PNF), and muscle energy technique (MET).

**Polarity Therapy.** Developed by Dr. Randolph Stone in the 1950s, polarity therapy is based on the idea that the body has an electromagnetic field that can be balanced by gentle rocking movements and specific hand placements. Polarity therapy is an energy-based healthcare system that incorporates diet, exercise, and self-awareness into its practice.

**Reflexology.** Based on the belief that points on the feet, hands, and ears correspond to all areas of the body, including the glands and organs, therapists use reflexology to stimulate these points to balance the body and promote wellness. Eunice Ingham, an American physical therapist, developed American reflexology, but there is also an Eastern tradition of reflexology that likely originated in China.

**Seated or Chair Massage.** Seated massage is performed on-site, at an office or an event, with the fully clothed client seated in a specially designed massage chair. Seated massage treatments last between ten and thirty minutes and often focus on the neck, shoulders, back, arms, and hands of the client.

**Spa Therapies.** Massage therapists use aromatherapy, hydrotherapy applications, mud, seaweed, and many other products to relax or revitalize the client, as well as stimulate natural detoxification of the body.

**Structural Integration.** Similar to Rolfing, structural integration is based on the work of biochemist Dr. Ida Rolf, a doctor of biological chemistry, in the 1940s. This therapy aims to reorder the structural alignment of the body and create a balanced central vertical line that exists in harmony with the forces of gravity. ■

## Eastern Approaches to Massage and Bodywork

Eastern approaches to massage and bodywork developed in Asian cultures in countries such as Japan, China, India, Tibet, Korea, and surrounding areas. The Eastern tradition of healing is based on concepts of yin and yang, qi, and the

five elements. These concepts are both poetic and practical. They form a comprehensive system of client analysis and treatment that is validated by modern science.

In general, yin and yang represent relationship and connection. This concept helps the therapist locate and treat an excess or deficiency in the body. Some treatment choices may aim to balance yin and yang elements in the body, mind, and spirit as part of the session.

Eastern systems also focus on promoting harmony in the flow of qi as a means to prevent disease and create wellness. Qi (also written *chi*, *ki*, or *prana*) is understood as life force or life energy. It flows along specific pathways in the body called *meridians*.

Eastern-trained therapists also use the five elements—wood, fire, earth, metal, and water—as a means to identify disharmony and to promote health through balance as they relate to the body. These elements correspond to qualities in nature, the seasons, and the human body.

Eastern modalities often use pressure from fingers, hands, thumbs, elbows, knees, and the feet. Stretching may also be used to help open up the body and free energy. In some types of treatments, bodywork will be performed on a mat on the floor. Oftentimes, the client is clothed except for his or her shoes. Some well-known Eastern approaches to massage and bodywork are discussed below.

**Abhyanga.** *Abhyanga* is the Sanskrit word for oil massage. This is a form of external treatment used in ayurvedic medicine from India and Sri Lanka. In ayurveda, external treatments aim to balance a client's dosha constitution and promote detoxification. The three doshas are combinations of five ayurvedic elements known as ether (space), air, fire, water, and earth.



In general, yin and yang represent relationship and connection. This concept helps the therapist locate and treat an excess or deficiency in the body.



**Acupressure.** Based on Chinese meridian theory, acupressure therapy is when direct pressure is applied to acupuncture points (specific areas along the meridian) to stimulate the flow of qi.

**Amma.** Amma is traditional Japanese massage, also called *anna*.

**Chi Nei Tsang.** This form of Taoist medicine was brought to the West by Tao Master Mantak Chia. It focuses on internal organs, circulation, lymphatic system, muscular system, and meridians to balance mental, emotional, and physical energy.

**Gua Sha.** Meaning to “scrape toxins,” gua sha has been used as a treatment in China for more than two thousand years. Herbal oils are applied to the skin, before it is scraped with a flat tool, to stimulate circulation and detoxify the blood, lymph, and body.

**Jin Shin Do.** Developed by Iona Marsaa in the United States in 1970, this bodywork modality is a fusion of traditional Chinese acupressure, breathing exercises, and Taoist philosophy.

**Qigong.** Meaning “energy-skill,” qigong involves the use of breathing patterns, physical postures, meditation, and movements to maintain health. There are many different

schools of qigong, which is also taught in conjunction with some forms of Chinese martial arts. Advanced practitioners of qigong develop the ability to direct the movement of qi (energy) with their mind and focus it externally to heal others.

**Shiatsu.** The name means “finger pressure” in Japanese. This is a bodywork modality that combines acupressure on acupuncture meridians, stretching, joint movements, and massage strokes. It has evolved into numerous forms, including Zen shiatsu, the Namikoshi method, and five element shiatsu.

**Thai Massage.** Practiced in Thailand for more than 2,500 years, Thai massage is performed on a flat mat on the floor with the client fully clothed. Passive stretches and direct pressure along energy lines aim to balance and revitalize the body.

**Tui Na.** Traditional Chinese massage is called tui na and used to promote health and stimulate the immune system. The techniques used in tui na are sometimes mistaken for acupressure because the arms, hands, fingers, elbows, and knees are used as a tool to stimulate acupuncture points and specific regions of the body. Treatments are usually applied over loose clothing and not directly to the bare skin. Herbal rubs may be used in combination with the tui na treatment. ■

**M**assage is offered in a variety of locations and to a variety of clients to achieve a variety of treatment goals. Massage therapists define their careers based on a personal philosophy of health and wellness, their interests, their financial needs, and their ideal work schedules. In fact, one of the reasons people choose a massage career is the flexibility it offers. A massage career also allows for continued growth throughout a therapist's lifetime. Therapists may choose to learn new techniques as their interests evolve, change the type of environment in which they offer massage, or choose to work with different client groups. Anything and everything is possible with a massage career. There is not a one-size-fits-all career option. Your career is in your hands and massage school is just the starting point. Where you take it from there is up to you!

In the following pages, different massage environments are described to help prospective students develop a greater understanding of the opportunities that exist in the massage profession.

### Work in a Massage Clinic

A massage clinic can take many different forms. It often accommodates a number of massage therapists, a receptionist, and possibly a manager and bookkeeper. In one scenario, an employer owns the business and employs or subcontracts the massage therapists. In another scenario, a group of therapists join forces to share resources. Each is responsible for managing his or her



own finances and pays a share of business expenses (e.g., advertising, cleaning, equipment, laundry, lease, phones, receptionist).

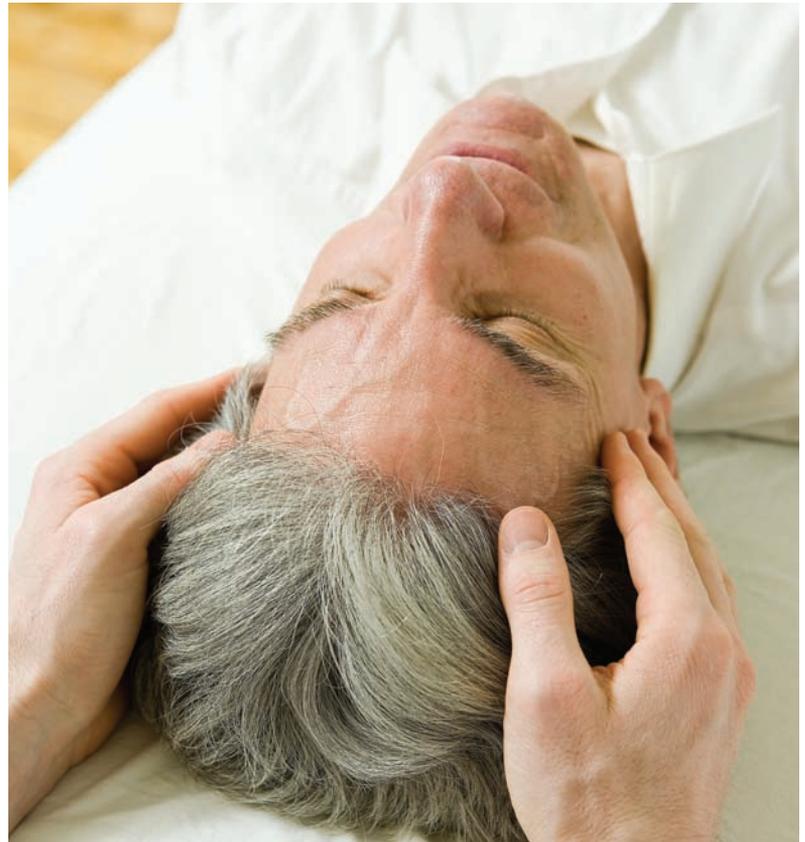
A massage clinic may have a very specific focus or it may take a broad approach to attracting clients. Some clinics set themselves apart by focusing on a select client group, such as pregnant woman, athletes, or individuals with soft-tissue injuries or a pathology. Other clinics take a wellness approach and offer a little of everything. A clinic might spotlight a specific modality such as reflexology, neuromuscular therapy, Eastern bodywork, or myofascial massage.

## Work in a Wellness Center

Wellness programs emphasize the importance of paying attention to the body, mind, and spirit to promote and maintain optimum health. In this setting, the massage therapist is one of many different types of wellness professionals. Others working at the center may include a chiropractor, physical therapist, nutritionist, naturopathic doctor, meditation leader, spiritual counselor, allopathic doctor, fitness trainer, counselor, yoga instructor, life coach, hypnotherapist, or esthetician.

Wellness centers are found in many different types of locations and may be included on a college campus, in a community center, at a large corporation, as part of a medical clinic, in gyms, in retirement homes, or as a stand-alone facility similar to a spa.

One of the exciting things about working in a wellness center is that therapists are able to learn from other healthcare



providers. They are exposed to new ideas for achieving health. This gives them a broader perspective when dealing with individual clients and informs their treatment choices.

The massage student who aims to work at a wellness center must understand wellness models, look closely at the role of a massage therapist within a wellness model, and practice wellness in his or her own life. In the simplest model, the balance between the body, mind, and spirit is explored. More complex models might include planetary wellness, interpersonal or social wellness, and occupational wellness.



## Start a Private Practice

Massage therapists who start up a private practice may rent or buy an office space or simply use their homes. Self-employment allows the therapists to set their own work hours, create their own work environment, and have control over the types of clients they see. The drawback is there is no safety net. They will only make a living if they can attract and retain their clients. They also have to be responsible for complying with state regulations, bookkeeping, and marketing of the business.

The massage student who wants to open a private practice must be willing and eager to become a businessperson as well as a therapist. Pay close attention during business classes in massage school and do additional reading on business topics such as accounting, marketing, and promotion. ABMP provides a wide variety of business resources for members.

## Work at a Spa

According to a survey conducted by the International Spa Association ([www.experienceispa.com](http://www.experienceispa.com)), there were approximately 138 million visits made to the United States spas in 2007. Spas are currently the number one employer of massage therapists and massage is the most requested service at spas. Massage therapists hired to work in a spa setting enjoy luxury surroundings and benefit from contact with an assortment of wellness professionals and from exposure to numerous products and techniques. The work is creative and varied, often allowing the therapist to offer different types of body treatments during the course of the day. There is also the opportunity to advance into different positions at the spa, especially at a large spa. In

The massage student who wants to open a private practice must be willing and eager to become a businessperson as well as a therapist.

this case, a talented and dedicated massage therapist might work his or her way up to massage department manager, spa consultant, spa director, or even spa owner.

The massage student hoping to work in the spa industry must learn about spa body treatments and how to deliver them.

These treatments include aromatherapy, ayurvedic treatments, body wraps, cocoons, hydrotherapy treatments, mud (fango) treatments, salt and sugar glows, seaweed (thalassotherapy) treatments, spa foot treatments, stone massage, and others. Training may be found at schools with specific programs in spa therapies or through continuing education classes.

## Work in a Medical Setting

There are a number of different medical environments where massage therapists might work. These include a chiropractic office, hospital, hospice, naturopathic practice, sports medicine clinic, physical therapy office, or rehabilitation center. In some states, complementary medicine is recognized on health insurance plans. With a

doctor's diagnosis and referral, massage therapists in these states can bill insurance companies for the treatment.

The massage student interested in working closely with medical professionals should spend extra time studying medical terminology, soft-tissue pathology, assessment, insurance billing, record keeping, medical conditions and their contraindications, and pharmacology as it relates to massage.

## Work on a Cruise Ship

Cruise ship work appeals to many therapists who want to travel and meet new people. Cruise ship work provides an opportunity to practice massage on a variety of body types, thereby building valuable experience. There are some clear benefits to this type of work; compensation often includes room and board, medical insurance (required by maritime law), and reduced prices on cruise vacations for friends and family.

If the therapist decides that life on the high seas is the goal, he or she might prepare by getting into good shape and learning good body mechanics. While good health and good



body mechanics are always important, massage shifts on a cruise ship are particularly demanding, lasting as long as twelve hours, with back-to-back appointments. As with any job, research cruise ships carefully and compare rates of pay and work hours.

## Work On-Site Providing Seated Massage

On-site, seated, or chair massage is offered in a number of different locations. Seated massage services are popular in an ever-growing variety of locations including malls, airports, events (like walk-a-thons or sporting events), and in the corporate workplace. Therapists may choose to do seated massage part time or as a main massage occupation.

Many therapists begin seated massage careers by setting up corporate accounts. They contact local businesses, educate the owners about the benefits of massage, and offer an initial session for employees. Weekly or monthly office appointments may be set up based on the size of the business and the number of interested employees. The massage is delivered through the client's clothing without lubricants, in segments lasting from just a few minutes to half an hour.

Therapists may choose to do seated massage part time or as a main massage occupation.



## Work with Clients with Special Needs

Massage therapists are sometimes drawn to work with a particular type of client and focus their career to those clients' special needs.

**Geriatric Massage.** Geriatric massage supports healthy aging and may provide relief from some symptoms of age-related health problems. Work with elderly clients requires the therapist to develop specialized understanding. The therapist must pay close attention to each client's medications and the ways they might interact with massage. These clients may have difficulty feeling comfortable for a full hour treatment, and the treatment time may need to be adjusted. As with all clients, the therapist will need to understand all existing medical conditions and any adaptive measures required.

**Pregnancy Massage.** A therapist may specialize in prenatal and postnatal massage to work with pregnant woman and infants. Massage can

provide relief from the aches and pains of a pregnant body, so long as the therapist understands how to position the client properly and deliver appropriate techniques. Most schools cover basic pregnancy massage; many offer advanced training classes in pregnancy and infant massage as continuing education.

**Sports Massage.** Athletes recognize that massage increases flexibility, supports the recovery process from events or hard training sessions, and improves performance. Therapists who want to move into this area will need to have a thorough understanding of muscles and their functions. They will also need to understand which muscles are being stressed in a particular sport; runners will likely benefit from a different approach to massage than swimmers.



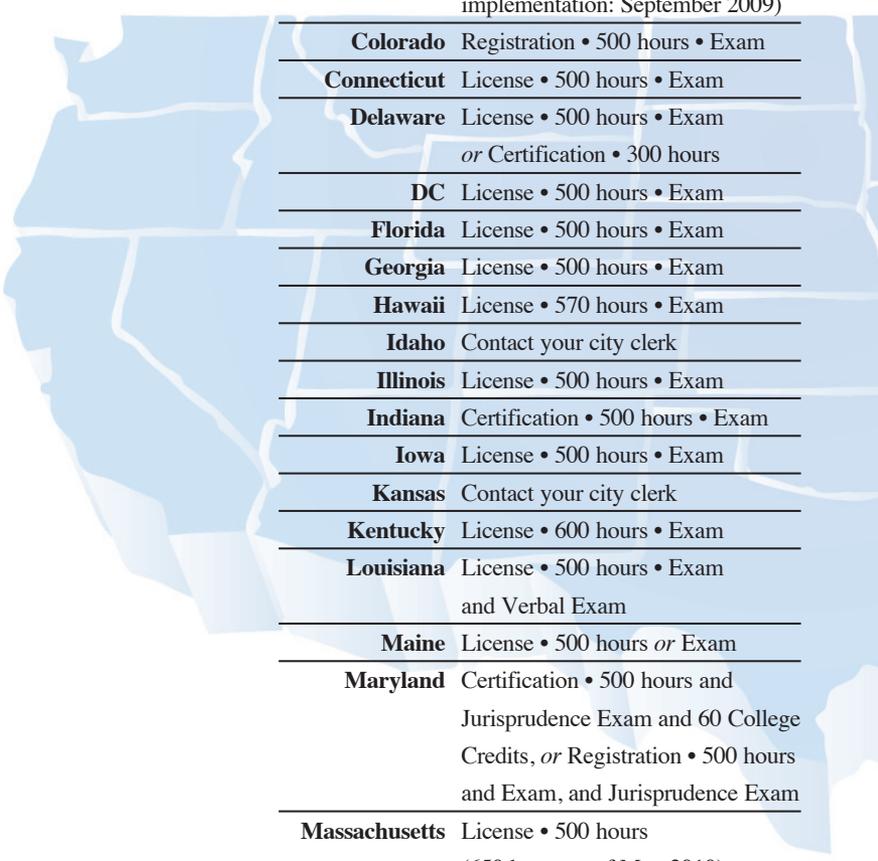
Other areas of specialization include animal massage, work with the chronically or terminally ill, the physically challenged, and with clients with mental health issues. ■

Currently, the majority of states regulate the practice of massage and require prospective massage therapists to complete a licensing process to receive massage credentials. The word *license* or *licensing* is used for ease of description, but in some states the designation is *registration* or *certification*. Most states require 500 hours of training to be eligible for the licensing process, but each state is different. The chart included in this section provides an overview of each state's educational and licensing requirements. Your massage school will provide you with details of state and local requirements. You can also view information on your state massage board's website; links are provided at [www.massagetherapy.com](http://www.massagetherapy.com). In states without statewide regulations, local regulations may exist; contact your city clerk for details.

After graduation from a state-approved school, the graduate typically sits for a state-approved massage and bodywork licensing exam. This is a written exam that tests the student's understanding of topics like anatomy and physiology, muscles, massage strokes and their benefits, sanitation protocol, contraindications to massage, and other massage-related information. Massage schools develop their curricula so that students are prepared for the licensing exam. If you pay attention in classes and complete homework assignments, it is unlikely that you will have difficulty passing a licensing exam.

In some states, the applicant must also pass a jurisprudence exam, which consists of questions about the massage laws and regulations in that state. Practical exams test the applicant's massage skills, by watching the applicant provide massage strokes to a "testing body." The testing panel grades the applicant on the quality of the techniques, draping skills and professionalism. Upon successful completion of the

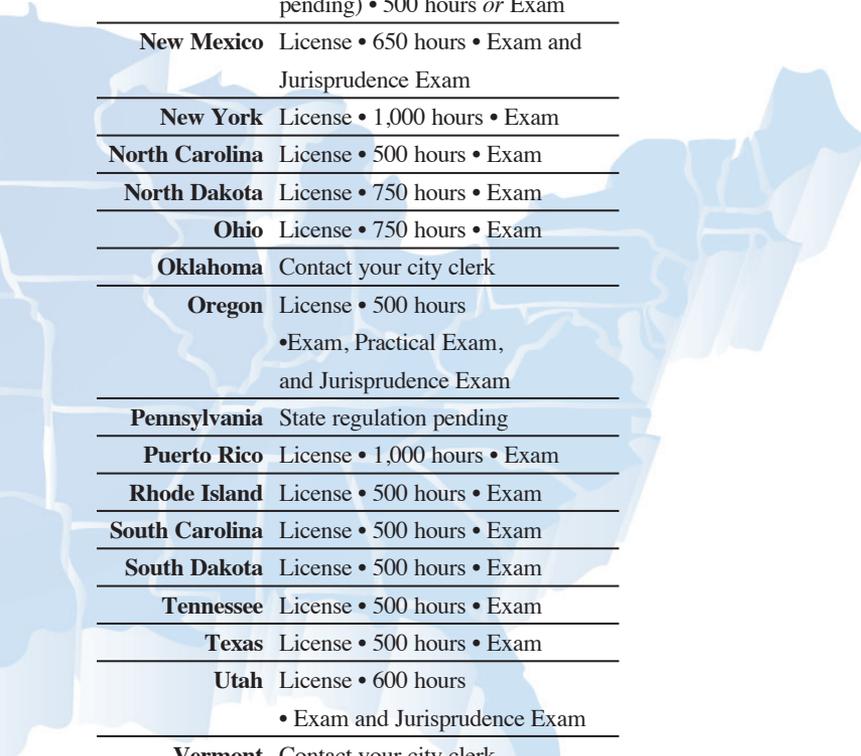
## State Designation



<b>Alabama</b>	License • 650 hours • Exam
<b>Alaska</b>	Contact your city clerk
<b>Arizona</b>	License • 700 hours • Exam
<b>Arkansas</b>	License • 500 hours • Exam, Jurisprudence exam, TB test
<b>California</b>	Voluntary Certification (Expected implementation: September 2009)
<b>Colorado</b>	Registration • 500 hours • Exam
<b>Connecticut</b>	License • 500 hours • Exam
<b>Delaware</b>	License • 500 hours • Exam or Certification • 300 hours
<b>DC</b>	License • 500 hours • Exam
<b>Florida</b>	License • 500 hours • Exam
<b>Georgia</b>	License • 500 hours • Exam
<b>Hawaii</b>	License • 570 hours • Exam
<b>Idaho</b>	Contact your city clerk
<b>Illinois</b>	License • 500 hours • Exam
<b>Indiana</b>	Certification • 500 hours • Exam
<b>Iowa</b>	License • 500 hours • Exam
<b>Kansas</b>	Contact your city clerk
<b>Kentucky</b>	License • 600 hours • Exam
<b>Louisiana</b>	License • 500 hours • Exam and Verbal Exam
<b>Maine</b>	License • 500 hours or Exam
<b>Maryland</b>	Certification • 500 hours and Jurisprudence Exam and 60 College Credits, or Registration • 500 hours and Exam, and Jurisprudence Exam
<b>Massachusetts</b>	License • 500 hours (650 hours as of May 2010)
<b>Michigan</b>	State regulation pending
<b>Minnesota</b>	Contact your city clerk
<b>Mississippi</b>	License • 700 hours • Exam
<b>Missouri</b>	License • 500 hours • Exam

Please note that this chart lists general regulatory information and additional conditions may apply. For more information, visit

## Requirements



<b>Montana</b>	State regulation pending
<b>Nebraska</b>	License • 1,000 hours • Exam
<b>Nevada</b>	License • 500 hours • Exam
<b>New Hampshire</b>	License • 750 hours • Exam and Practical Exam
<b>New Jersey</b>	Voluntary Certification (Licensing pending) • 500 hours <i>or</i> Exam
<b>New Mexico</b>	License • 650 hours • Exam and Jurisprudence Exam
<b>New York</b>	License • 1,000 hours • Exam
<b>North Carolina</b>	License • 500 hours • Exam
<b>North Dakota</b>	License • 750 hours • Exam
<b>Ohio</b>	License • 750 hours • Exam
<b>Oklahoma</b>	Contact your city clerk
<b>Oregon</b>	License • 500 hours • Exam, Practical Exam, and Jurisprudence Exam
<b>Pennsylvania</b>	State regulation pending
<b>Puerto Rico</b>	License • 1,000 hours • Exam
<b>Rhode Island</b>	License • 500 hours • Exam
<b>South Carolina</b>	License • 500 hours • Exam
<b>South Dakota</b>	License • 500 hours • Exam
<b>Tennessee</b>	License • 500 hours • Exam
<b>Texas</b>	License • 500 hours • Exam
<b>Utah</b>	License • 600 hours • Exam and Jurisprudence Exam
<b>Vermont</b>	Contact your city clerk
<b>Virginia</b>	Certification • 500 hours • Exam
<b>Washington</b>	License • 500 hours • Exam and Jurisprudence Exam
<b>West Virginia</b>	License • 500 hours • Exam
<b>Wisconsin</b>	Certification • 600 hours • Exam
<b>Wyoming</b>	Contact your city clerk

was current as of July 2009. Information is subject to change and  
visit your state board's website at [www.massagetherapy.com](http://www.massagetherapy.com).

testing process, the applicant applies for a state  
license and receives his or her massage credentials.

## Continuing Education

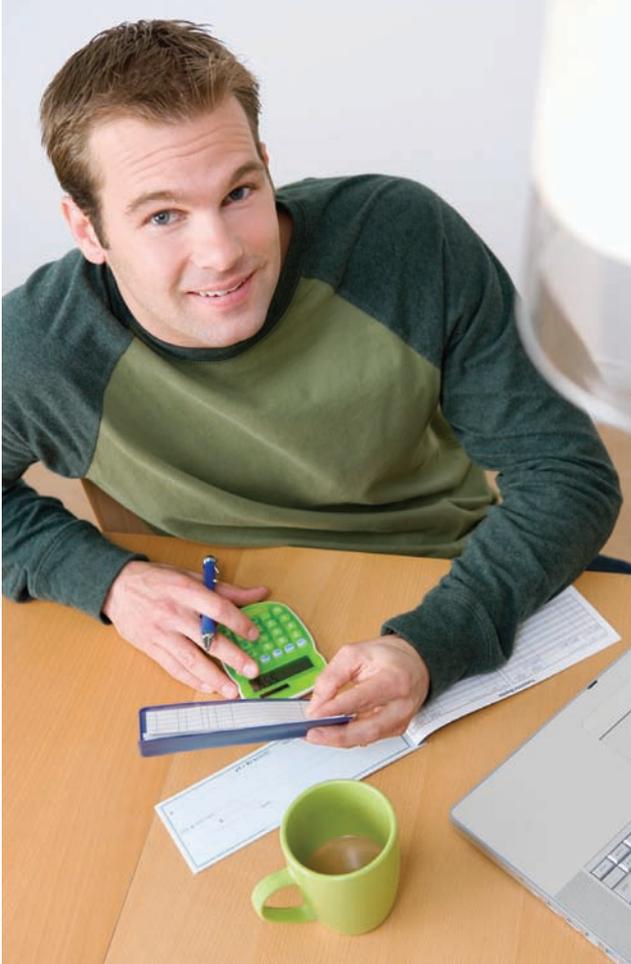
Continuing education is additional training the  
therapist takes after he or she graduates from a  
massage training program. In many states it is  
required to maintain professional massage credentials.  
Continuing education classes allow the therapist  
to branch out, try new techniques, and network  
with other professionals. The number of hours of  
continuing education that you need each year will  
vary from state to state. Your massage school will  
discuss continuing education requirements as part  
of your training.

## Legal Regulations

Your massage school instructors will discuss scope of  
practice and the legal regulations in the state where  
the school is located. Scope of practice refers to the  
activities and techniques the therapist is allowed to  
provide to clients. For example, a massage therapist  
can manipulate (massage) soft-tissue structures, but  
cannot realign the spinal column as would occur in a  
chiropractic session. If a massage therapist would try  
to realign the spinal column during a massage session,  
he or she would be working out of the scope of  
practice for massage and potentially breaking the law.

The laws regarding massage vary a great deal from  
state to state. Your massage school will explain the  
requirements for practice in the state where you live.  
For additional information, including contact details  
for your state massage board, visit ABMP's massage  
education site, [www.massagetherapy.com](http://www.massagetherapy.com). ■

# financial expectations



It is very rare for a therapist to give 40 hours of massage during a workweek. It is more likely that a therapist will deliver between eight and 25 hours of massage in a workweek.

The amount clients pay for massage varies a great deal depending on the setting and the region of the country where they receive the massage. A common price range for massage is \$40–\$90 an hour, with some lavish spas charging even more. Massage therapists in private practice take home the entire amount, after deducting expenses and taxes. Expenses include all business costs such as advertising and marketing, insurance, laundry, phone, rent, supplies (e.g., linens and oil), and utilities.

A massage therapist who works as an employee will often be paid a flat fee for each massage. This fee can range from \$15 to \$40 an hour. Some clinics pay therapists one amount when they are on a shift but not providing massage, and another amount when they are providing massage. For example, during a four-hour shift, a therapist may provide two hour-long massages and have two hours during which he or she handles administrative tasks. For each hour providing massage, the hourly pay is \$20. For each hour of administrative or down time, the hourly pay is \$8.

It is very rare for a therapist to give 40 hours of massage during a workweek. It is more likely that a therapist will deliver between eight and 25 hours of massage in a workweek, either because massage is a part-time job, or because additional time is spent attending to administrative duties or running a business. It would also be physically exhausting to deliver 40 hours of massage a week. Many therapists choose to pursue massage as a part-time career for various reasons. Some are getting a degree in school, some are parents and reserve time for their children, and some offer massage because it is fun and rewarding. For this reason, massage therapists' annual incomes can range from as low as \$10,000 up to \$60,000 a year. The range is influenced by the experience of the therapists, the area where they practice massage, the number of massages they provide each week, and the terms of their employment or business. ■

In your classes, you will have the opportunity to interact with students from different cultural backgrounds, different generations, and different life experiences. Instructors will share their passion and knowledge of the real world and help you identify your special strengths. These individuals will become your community. They will stimulate you to learn, challenge you to try new techniques, cheer when you pass your anatomy quiz, and give you the support you need. The relationships you develop in massage school will be life changing and feed the compassion and open-mindedness you will need as a professional.

Some topics are taught in a traditional classroom setting through lecture, study, and test taking. Other topics require hands-on practice. To get the most from training and be a

valued and positive contributor to the classroom experience, it is helpful if the prospective student thinks carefully about the unique challenges of massage school before enrolling in classes.

### Tolerance and Respect for Diversity

Each of us has a cultural background that shapes how we view others, the world, and ourselves. Our behavior and the way we express ourselves is impacted in a large part by our cultural beliefs and values. Stereotypes, intolerance, and racism arise in part because people have difficulty stepping outside a familiar culture to see the world from a different viewpoint. Open-mindedness is key to a successful career in massage therapy.

Massage therapists work with people from a variety of cultural, religious, political, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Learning to tolerate and respect diversity and the beliefs of other people is part of the process of becoming a massage therapist. You don't have to get along with someone personally, or agree with his or her ideas, to work with him or her professionally.

For example, when you graduate and get a job, you will sometimes find yourself giving a massage to someone who may make you feel uncomfortable. This discomfort may arise



because he or she makes a political comment you disagree with or expresses religious beliefs different from your own. Perhaps he or she comes from a different cultural background and has habits and behaviors that seem unusual to you. As a professional, your responsibility is to provide a massage of equal quality and with equal care as you provide to all of your clients.

Working through discomfort in this case is different from the discomfort of working with a client who shows little



personal modesty or makes sexually inappropriate comments. In this situation, it is important to set suitable boundaries for the client or discontinue the therapeutic relationship. Part of your training will address communication and behavior about sexual boundary and ethical issues.

The massage practice classroom mimics real world experience. As a student, you will be expected to give massages to all of the people in your class, even those people who you may not get along with personally. You will also be expected to receive massages from all of the people in your class. It is important to understand this and to embrace this chance to practice tolerance and professionalism.

## Draping & Gluteal Massage

One of the expectations of a massage student is a commitment to working through discomfort in order to participate fully in classes. In a massage exchange, you will act as the client for one massage and as the therapist for another. In fact, you can learn as much from getting a massage as giving one. Your instructors will teach you how to drape the client so that his or her modesty is always preserved during the session. As a client, however, you will not be wearing any clothing (including underclothing) when under the drape. This sometimes worries novice students because being undressed, although draped, can make a person feel vulnerable. Your massage instructors will understand this and help you to work through your feelings.

Another concern for novice students is gluteal massage. The gluteal muscles, or the muscles that make up your buttocks, contract or lengthen to create movement at the hip and help stabilize the pelvis. These muscles often play a role in back pain and numerous other conditions that can affect a client's ability to move freely and without pain. In class, you will learn about each of the different gluteal muscles and techniques for massaging these muscles. As a student, you will most likely be required to give and receive gluteal massage as part of your training.

## Acceptance of Different Body Types

Massage therapists work with a wide variety of body types and conditions in their careers. As a therapist, you will likely give a massage to a person who:

- Is overweight.
- Is underweight.
- Has a skin condition.
- Has a hairy back.
- Has foot odor.
- Smells of cigarette smoke.
- Has strong body odor.

It is important to accept each and every body type without bias. A massage session should provide a client with an opportunity to feel entirely comfortable with his or her body. If you regularly judge people for their bodies, you will need to cultivate greater acceptance of other people and more professionalism. It is not appropriate to say, “I just won’t work on clients who are \_\_\_\_\_.” Every client deserves the very best care and consideration.

## Massage Career Compatibility with Religion

Frequently, students who practice a Western religion feel concern about Eastern and energetic approaches to bodywork and massage. It is important to understand that Eastern and energetic bodywork—most massage and bodywork for that matter—is not religious in nature. The confusion seems to arise because these approaches tend to explain the body and disease in metaphorical and poetic ways. Different religions also explain their beliefs in a metaphorical and poetic way. This can make learning Eastern or energetic bodywork seem religious. Like Western approaches to massage, Eastern and energetic approaches to massage focus on bringing balance to the body,



supporting the body’s ability to heal itself, and helping the body to function more efficiently.

One way to proactively approach the situation is to ask the school to allow you to share a copy of the Eastern or energy-based curriculum with your religious leader. This way you can feel good learning about these remarkable forms of bodywork and commit completely to your training program. You should be aware that the massage school has an obligation to treat each student equally. Once you enter a program, you are responsible to fulfill all of the school’s requirements, whether or not you agree with a technique’s background and philosophy.

Each of the situations described above may seem challenging and even threatening. Massage school requires students to pay attention to their feelings and to question their own initial responses to situations. It can feel scary and uncomfortable to grow as an individual. The massage students who are open to these emotions and work through them will develop into successful therapists. ■

# Support from ABMP

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**A**ssociated Bodywork & Massage Professionals (ABMP) is a membership organization serving the massage, bodywork, and somatic professions. We partner with students, schools, instructors, and professionals to uphold a thriving massage and bodywork profession. When you join ABMP as a student, you receive a number of products and services that support your educational process and that help you become a successful practitioner.

***Student Success Guide.*** This guide is designed to help students deal with the transition to being a student, pay attention to their personal needs, develop useful and efficient study skills, and

cope with the demands of a massage curriculum. Each section of the guide contains important information, fun tips, goal-setting exercises, charts, and personal progress assessments.



***Massage Year Planner.*** The *Massage Year Planner* provides students with a tool to arrange their schedule, plan assignments, arrange study sessions, and organize life. Throughout the planner, goal-setting exercises and tips for success keep the

process of staying organized interesting. It also provides a place for photos and notes from classmates, becoming a treasured keepsake at the end of the massage training.

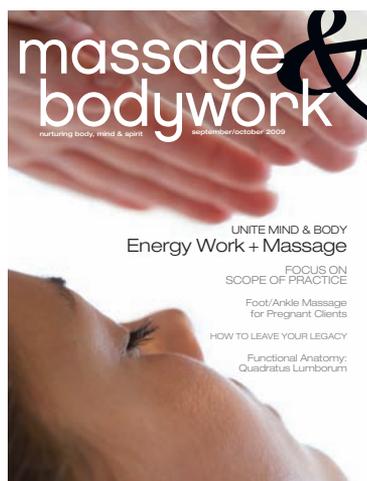


**Kneads to Know.** This quarterly newsletter is filled with hints and tips to help you succeed in massage school, practice good self-care, and plan the first steps of your career.

**Online Student Resources.** Student members of

ABMP are encouraged to explore and use the extensive collection of resources designed to help students succeed in massage school and launch their professional careers in the “Student Resources” section of [www.abmp.com](http://www.abmp.com). Download helpful study forms, samples of resumes, and more.

**Massage & Bodywork magazine.** This award-winning, beautifully designed, professional, and informative bimonthly publication keeps you connected with the latest research,



techniques, perspectives, and trends in the massage and bodywork industry.

**ABMP Member Website.** [ABMP.com](http://ABMP.com) contains a variety of supportive information and features that help students stay connected to the broader massage profession.

**Liability Insurance.** This comprehensive coverage protects you from liability claims in and out of the classroom for all school-sanctioned activities.

**Support.** Helpful, caring support is available any time you have a question. Call the ABMP staff at 800-458-2267 or send an e-mail to [expectmore@abmp.com](mailto:expectmore@abmp.com).

Student membership is in effect for the length of membership you select (up to 12, 18, or 24 months), or until you get your license (if applicable), whichever date comes first. As a student member, you are eligible for a discounted rate for your first year of professional membership when you upgrade at graduation. Contact ABMP at 800-458-2267 or visit [www.abmp.com](http://www.abmp.com) to become a member today. ■



