

Body Mapping for Beginners



Tips from Dr. Madison Booth, LBME

Congratulations! You've started your Body Mapping journey for easier movement and injury prevention. Body Mapping transformed my musicianship and movement by helping me develop my awareness and learn more about human anatomy. I am confident you will experience similar benefits with consistent, intentional practice.

What is Body Mapping?

Body Mapping is a somatic method that studies the body in movement. It was developed by music educators and Alexander Technique teachers, Barbara and William Conable in the 1990's.

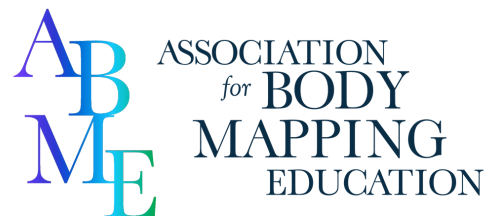
Neuroscience research shows that we all have maps in our brains that tell us how we move. These maps are self-representations that can be accurate or inaccurate depending on our previous experiences.

Accurate maps = free, easy movement

Inaccurate maps = discomfort, tension, pain

Because Body Mapping is a method practiced primarily through self-study, I have created this free guide to help you get started! There are a lot of ways to incorporate Body Mapping into your music-making and I encourage you to find the strategies that work best for you and are easy to integrate into your life.

Below you'll find a list of self-study strategies recommended by the Association for Body Mapping Education (ABME) and examples of how you can put them into practice based on my own experience as a Body Mapping student and teacher.





Ask yourself reflection questions.



This can be a little tricky if you’re not used to approaching your music-making and movement with curiosity. As musicians, we are often trained to be critical of ourselves and others so that we can quickly assess problems and find solutions. This is not necessarily a bad thing, but it can quickly turn into self-deprecation which can be overwhelming and exhausting. Instead of being *critical*, Body Mapping invites us to be *curious*. Ask yourself the following questions without judgment:

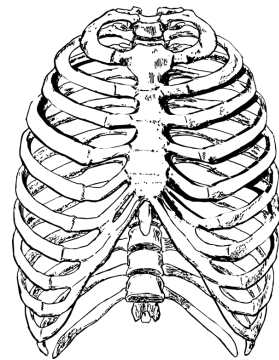
Am I experiencing any pain or discomfort while I play? If so, where in my body do I feel it?
Am I experiencing limitations in my movement while I play? Where do I wish to feel more ease in my body?
What do I believe about the size of [insert area of the body here, for example “my skull”]? Is what I believe true?
What do I believe about the structure of [insert area of the body here, for example “my arms”]? Is what I believe true?
What do I believe the function of [insert area of the body here, for example “my spine”] serves? Is what I believe true?

As you answer these questions, try not to jump to immediately fixing whatever you believe is the problem. Instead, compare your answers to anatomically-accurate images, videos, or explanations found in the resources I recommend at the end of this guide. When you learn something new, say “Oh, that’s interesting! I wonder if that will change my physical experience,” and then try it on!

2 Study accurate anatomical images and models.

I love studying the images and videos in the resources listed at the end of this guide. Because many are created by Body Mapping educators, we can trust that they are not only anatomically-accurate and reviewed by ABME's scientific advisory board, but also approached with the needs of musicians in mind.

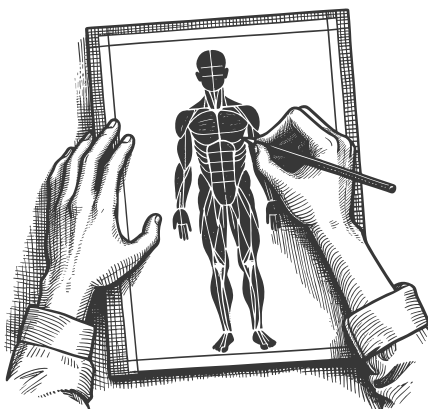
I also love studying accurate models. I have my own mini-skeleton, spine, skull, and arm models which I have found tremendously useful. Seeing and touching the models really helped me get a better understanding of my anatomy in "3D." I recommend checking out the skeletal models from Anatomy Warehouse ([click here](#)). They've haven't steered me wrong yet!



3 Draw or trace accurate anatomical images.

I'm not much of a visual artist, so drawing anatomical images can sometimes frustrate me. However, I give myself permission to do my best and assess my intentions for my drawing even the actual result doesn't look "quite right." For example: "Did I attempt to draw the curves or the spine or did I draw a straight line because I forgot my spine has curves?"

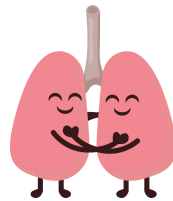
When I'm not in the mood to put my visual art skills to the test, I love coloring and tracing anatomical images in my anatomy coloring book. I personally use *The Anatomy Coloring Book* by Wynn Kapit and Lawrence M. Elson ([linked here](#)).



4 Observe your movement using mirrors and/or recording yourself.

If you're a musician, you've probably heard this one before. Recording ourselves is often recommended as a way to analyze our artistic choices. However, you can also use your video recordings and mirrors to analyze your movement. When you watch yourself, do you notice any movement that looks tense? Do you look uncomfortable? When you hear yourself make a mistake or fail to communicate a musical idea, what movement is happening simultaneously? Are the two related? (Answer: probably.)

5 Palpate your own body.



I'm sure this is obvious, but this is not the anatomically-accurate image of lungs I recommend studying - it's just cute, haha!

To palpate your body means to examine your body through touch. This might feel a little weird if it's not something you're used to doing. Simply put, you're going to try to feel your bones, joints, and muscles. Try to feel exactly where they are, how big they are, where they start and end, etc. Andrew Biel's *Trail Guide to the Body* ([click here](#)) helped me get comfortable with palpating and trusting my experience. It's a textbook for massage therapists, so the amount of information can be overwhelming, but just take what is helpful and leave the rest. You don't have to palpate everything. Start small. Try palpating one bone or one joint and find the chapter of the book that teaches you how. I recommend starting with something easy to feel and see, like your elbow joints!

6 Observe musicians who appear to move freely and with ease.

Watch other musicians who just make it look easy! Here are a couple of my favorites:

Yuja Wang: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NsqXCO0ADwM&t=163s>

Esperanza Spaulding: <https://www.pbs.org/video/i-adore-you-uboln8/>

7 Apply insights from other somatic methods and notice your movement in daily life.

If you study any other somatic methods like Alexander Technique or the Feldenkrais Method, these can work in tandem with your Body Mapping studies. I also benefitted from bringing my awareness to my movement in my daily life. I love weightlifting and strength training, and I found that mapping my bones, joints, and muscles helped me move better in the gym, too!



8 Use constructive rest to develop your awareness.

Constructive rest is a tool you can use to practice awareness and find balance in your body. Usually, constructive rest is done while laying on the floor in a semi-supine position with knees bent and the soles of your feet resting on the floor. You can place a book under your head to help support you. The goal is to feel like your are not tucking or raising your chin. This helps bring your skull into balance with your spine and will reduce muscular tension. While in constructive rest, I like to pay attention to all of my senses, especially my sight, hearing, touch, smell, taste, and movement. I also bring attention to my breathing. I like to spend ten to twenty minutes in constructive rest at the start of my practice sessions, but even five minutes during a busy day really helps. If constructive rest is new to you, you can access my free guided constructive rest that I recorded just for you! [Click here for a guided constructive rest.](#)



Body Mapping Resources

There are many instrument-specific Body Mapping manuals and general anatomy resources out there for study. This is a list of some of my favorites that will be a good place for you to start.

Texts

What Every Musician Needs to Know About the Body: The Practical Application of Body Mapping to Making Music by Barbara Conable, Revised and Edited by Bridget Jankowski

How to Learn the Alexander Technique by Barbara and William Conable

What Every Singer Needs to Know About the Body by Melissa Malde, MaryJean Allen, and Kurt-Alexander Zeller

Trail Guide to the Body by Andrew Biel

The Anatomy Coloring Book by Wynn Kapit and Lawrence M. Elson

Videos

Move Well, Avoid Injury: What Every Musician Needs to Know About the Body, DVD, Andover Productions, LLC, 2010.

Breathing: <https://youtu.be/SAk77hTiwY?si=laEdfSGle3xDA4l>

@AnatomyLab on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/@AnatomyLab>

Additional Resources

The Association for Body Mapping Education offers workshops, courses, resources, and more for musicians and music educators. Joining as an affiliate member will give you access to many of these resources. Click here to visit the Association for Body Mapping Education site.



Want more guidance?

Set up a free 20-minute Body Mapping consultation with me. I'd love to help you find freedom & ease.

Click here to book now!