

## How to choose a school of massage therapy

Excerpts in quotes are taken from an article on the American Massage Therapy Association website called “*Starting a Career in Massage Therapy: What You Need to Know*”

“Massage is a healing art as well as a science. It requires a balance of academic and technical knowledge, clinical skills, manual dexterity, sensitivity, and awareness. It takes a sincere desire to help others, along with a commitment to the time, energy, and focus necessary for the training process in order to become a solid practitioner.”

“The training program curriculum should cover such subjects as anatomy, physiology, kinesiology, theory and practice of massage therapy, hands-on practice under faculty supervision, ethics and business practices.”

These quotes apply to massage programs that teach massage for people. Why should we compromise or relax these standards because we are working on animals? Any program offering instruction on massage must include on-site instruction of hands-on techniques to ensure the competency of its students. To be competent in massage, you must understand the anatomy and physiology of the body you intend to work on. The massage techniques must be fully understood and appropriately applied for the receiver to gain the maximum benefit. Massage strokes applied with too much pressure, in the wrong places, or to a pathology contraindicated for massage can do harm to the body.

“The vast majority of individuals entering the field now complete an educational training program. Prior to 1989, when the massage therapy profession was smaller and there were fewer schools, some people prepared by taking a number of workshops from different independent instructors or studying with a practitioner in an apprenticeship. Now it is important for those who want to work as massage therapists to complete effectively-designed training programs that offer a well-rounded curriculum that prepares them for the work environment they are seeking.”

In order to be taken seriously as a massage professional it is important to get education from a program that has a known track record for producing quality graduates. Veterinarians will be reluctant to refer animal clients to a therapist that has not had adequate training. If we are to be taken seriously as animal massage therapists it is imperative that we receive proper and appropriate training. No accredited human massage schools offer training where the student does not have to complete hands-on instruction. The only way to evaluate if a student is performing a massage technique correctly is to have students practice that technique with an instructor. When choosing a massage program you need to seriously consider the type of training that you want.

“Regulation and licensing requirements vary from state to state. Currently 38 states and the District of Columbia regulate massage therapy. Potential massage therapy students need to become familiar with the regulatory requirements in cities and states where they may wish to practice. Eligibility requirements range from 300 to 1,000 hours of in-class training. Frequently, states require a specified number of hours training in specific subjects. Some states also require training from an accredited massage training program or school. While most states require a minimum of 500 or more hours of massage training, there is a trend toward increasing the number of hours required.”

The standards above apply to human massage. In most states, the standards for the practice of animal massage are determined by the Board of Veterinary Medicine. The wording of the Veterinary Practice Act of each state determines what can be done to animals and by whom. In some states, addendums to the practice act or general laws of the state have been passed setting limits and or requirements of schooling for the practice of animal massage.

Based on the recommendations of the AMTA and ABMP, the minimum requirement for human massage schools is 500 hours. NBCAAM has established a minimum number of hours of training for animal massage and acupressure at 200 hours. This is less than what is required for human massage due to the fact that we do not have the issues of draping and modesty, insurance billing, oils or lubricants and some of the other business issues to deal with that need to be taught in human modalities. NBCAAM recommendations for schools is that the curriculum contain at least 50 hours of training in anatomy & physiology, kinesiology and pathologies; 100 hours of hands-on work, which would include assessment and treatment, benefits of massage, and practice guidelines; and the remaining 50 hours would be divided among classes such as business, ethics, behavior, safety, etc. We feel that by establishing minimum guidelines we can seek to assure the public, the veterinary community, practitioners, and future students that training in animal massage and acupressure attains high professional standards.

When looking for schools of animal massage check for the following:

- Learn about the profession of massage therapy, e.g. different methods of therapy and the particular requirements to practice in your state.
- Is the school licensed or accredited by the state in which it is located?
- Does the school offer hands-on training?
- What are the qualifications of the instructors?
- How long has the school been in business?
- Do they offer instruction in Anatomy & Physiology? Animal behavior and handling? Communicable diseases of animals? Pathologies of animals?

Review the curriculum to make sure that the style(s) of massage taught match what you want to learn.

Be aware of time requirements for a particular program. Make sure your other obligations will allow enough time to study and practice outside of class.