

On Laban Movement Analysis and The Eight Efforts

What Is It?

Laban technique was created by a Hungarian man named Rudolph Laban, who was interested in studying the language of movement. His studies began primarily in the dance world and eventually grew to incorporate education practices, factory workers and assembly lines, and movement therapy. Laban Movement Analysis (or, LMA) is a method and language for describing, visualizing, interpreting, and documenting all varieties of human movement. While the concepts he articulated are very helpful in creating and observing dance, they are also incredibly useful while acting.

Laban Movement Analysis Categories

Body
Shape
Space
Effort (Most Useful For Actors)

The **BODY** category describes structural and physical characteristics of the human body while moving. This category is responsible for describing which body parts are moving, which parts are connected, which parts are influenced by others, and general statements about body organization.

Several subcategories of Body are:

- Initiation of movement starting from specific bodies;
- Connection of different bodies to each other;
- Sequencing of movement between parts of the body;
- Patterns of body organization and connectivity

While the Body category primarily develops connections within the body and the body/space intent, the way the body changes shape during movement is further experienced and analyzed through the **SHAPE** category. It is important to remember that all categories are related, and Shape is often an integrating factor for combining the categories into meaningful movement.

There are several subcategories in Shape:

- "Shape Forms" describe static shapes that the body takes, such as Wall-like, Ball-like, and Pin-like.
- "Modes of Shape Change" describe the way the body is interacting with and the relationship the body has to the environment. There are three Modes of Shape Change:
 - Shape Flow: Representing a relationship of the body to itself. Essentially a stream of consciousness expressed through movement, this could be amoebic movement or could be mundane habitual actions, like shrugging, shivering, rubbing an injured shoulder, etc.
 - Directional: Representing a relationship where the body is directed toward some part of the environment. It is divided further into Spoke-like (punching, pointing, etc.) and Arc-like (swinging a tennis racket, painting a fence)
 - Carving: Representing a relationship where the body is actively and three dimensionally interacting with the volume of the environment. Examples include kneading bread dough, wringing out a towel, avoiding laser-beams or miming the shape of an imaginary object. In some cases, and historically, this is referred to as Shaping, though many practitioners feel that all three Modes of Shape Change are "shaping" in some way, and that the term is thus ambiguous and overloaded.
- "Shape Qualities" describe the way the body is changing (in an active way) toward some point in space. In the simplest form, this describes whether the body is currently Opening (growing larger with more extension) or Closing (growing smaller with more flexion). There are more specific terms – Rising, Sinking, Spreading, Enclosing, Advancing, and Retreating, which refer to specific dimensions of spatial orientations.
- "Shape Flow Support" describes the way the torso (primarily) can change in shape to support movements in the rest of the body. It is often referred to as something which is present or absent, though there are more refined descriptors.

The **SPACE** category involves motion in connection with the environment, and with spatial patterns, pathways, and lines of spatial tension. He felt that there were ways of organizing and moving in space that were specifically harmonious, in the same sense as music can be harmonious. Some combinations and

organizations were more theoretically and aesthetically pleasing. As with music, Space Harmony sometimes takes the form of set 'scales' of movement within geometric forms. These scales can be practiced in order to refine the range of movement and reveal individual movement preferences. The abstract and theoretical depth of this part of the system is often considered to be much greater than the rest of the system. In practical terms, there is much of the Space category that does not specifically contribute to the ideas of Space Harmony.

This category also describes and notates choices which refer specifically to space, paying attention to:

- Kinesphere: the area that the body is moving within and how the mover is paying attention to it.
- Spatial Intention: the directions or points in space that the mover is identifying or using.
- Geometrical observations of where the movement is being done, in terms of emphasis of directions, places in space, planar movement, etc.

EFFORT, or what Laban sometimes described as dynamics, is a system for understanding the more subtle characteristics about the way a movement is done with respect to inner intention. The difference between punching someone in anger and reaching for a glass is slight in terms of body organization-both rely on extension of the arm. The attention to the strength of the movement, the control of the movement and the timing of the movement are very different.

The Eight Efforts and Their Four Components

To understand Laban's efforts, one must understand the Four Components that, when arranged in specific ways, create the Eight Efforts of movement. Laban decided that human movement can be summarized by a combination of the following categories, each have two possible elements: **Space/Focus** (Direct or Indirect), **Time** (Quick or Sustained), **Weight** (Heavy or Light), and **Flow** (Bound or Free). So, if you're looking at Flow and the movement is bound, then it's very tight. It's very held in. Like an uptight businessman or cop. Whereas someone who flows freely, is the opposite. Think of a child, always running, always free, acting on any impulse that they desire.

The Four Components can be arranged to create the Eight Efforts are: Punch, Slash, Dab, Flick, Press, Wring, Glide, and Float.

	SPACE/FOCUS	TIME	WEIGHT	FLOW
PUNCH	Direct	Quick	Heavy	Bound
DAB	Direct	Quick	Light	Bound
PRESS	Direct	Sustained	Heavy	Bound
GLIDE	Direct	Sustained	Light	Free
SLASH	Indirect	Quick	Heavy	Free
FLICK	Indirect	Quick	Light	Free
WRING	Indirect	Sustained	Heavy	Bound
FLOAT	Indirect	Sustained	Light	Free

Investigating Time

There are two types of time: sustained time and quick or sudden time. It is important to remember that, in Laban, time is not only thought of in terms of actual speed, but in terms of attitude towards time as well. In other words, when given half an hour to complete a task, someone who's Sustained may take their time doing the task because they feel like they have a long time to complete it while someone on Quick time may rush because they feel like they *only* have half an hour to complete the task.

Investigating Space/Focus

Space or Focus in Laban can either be Direct or Indirect. Direct focus implies that you have a singular point of interest, and your attention is only on one thing and very specific. Indirect focus is not a lack of focus, but rather a widening of focus; instead of putting all of your attention on one specific object, you would open your attention to include multiple stimuli.

Investigating Weight

Weight can be thought of in terms of intensity or force. Heavy weight can be thought of in terms of intensity or force. Heavy weight can be thought of as a large exertion of force or can be expressed through strength. Light weight is as little force exerted as possible; it is buoyant and effortless.

Investigating Flow

Flow most accurately is a factor of continuity, progression, emotions, and involvement. Free flow is an outpouring, letting the inside out and the outside in, uncontrollable, can't be stopped, open hearted, fluid, etc. Bound flow is contained, controlled, keeping the inside in and the outside out.

How On Earth Is This Supposed to Help Me?

Many actors, especially young actors, have a hard time moving outside their own body. Every character moves like the actor moves when she/he is not onstage. Observe individuals or creatures in the world around you, try to identify the chief effort(s) with which they move and speak. Apply that to your character! By doing some close reading of our text, we can ascertain which effort our character moves with at any given time, allowing us to build a deeper relationship with our character. Even language or emotion can give us an idea on how Efforts can enhance our character.

When given a piece of text, make a chart and figure out your chief Laban Effort for your character. They probably have a default effort, but that doesn't mean your character can't switch from scene to scene, or even moment to moment.