

Principles of ATSI

Structural Integration (SI) can be defined at various levels. Here we list the progression of principles from which the Anatomy Trains Structural Integration (ATSI) programme derives its goals, objectives, strategies, and tactics.

Goals for SI are listed elsewhere. The 3- and 12-session recipes describe objectives, BodyReading and session plans ('launches') provide strategies, and the Fascial Release Techniques in our books and videos form a basis for sequential tactics.

Each principle can be framed as a question. These principles are not unique to SI, and could be re-jigged to derive nearly any therapeutic approach. They also apply, in a sense, to each intervention, each move, or each session, as well as the overall strategy for a series of sessions.

1) Energy - Is there sufficient available energy?

In the first interview, you and the client mutually determine your goals for the course of the therapy - however specific or 'blue sky' they may be. Is there sufficient energy within the client to accomplish those goals?

If the answer is yes, proceed to the next step. If not, you have a choice: either a) revise your / their goals to be within the range defined by the client's capacity, or b) find some more energy.

A change of diet, exercise, psychotherapy, epigenetics, or spiritual state might provide that energy, but it is counterproductive bordering on unethical to undertake a goal you know the client cannot attain. If neither a) nor b) are available, consider referral.

2) Adaptability - Where can we increase adaptability?

Given available energy, your first task is to increase adaptability in the organism. This phase is referred to by Rolf, Feldenkrais, and others as 'differentiation'. This denotes getting structures and tissues which are stuck together - either fascially or neurally - to work independently.

Getting muscles to let go of constant co-recruitment, joint tissues to relent, glued layers to slide on each other, breaking the sensori-motor amnesia cycle, and freeing neural, cranial, visceral, and myofascial restrictions - all these fall into the realm of increasing adaptability.

Often the first increase of myofascial adaptability is in opening the breath movement, which leads to a concomitant increase in physiological adaptability. Increasing motor and physiological adaptability via differentiation is usually the domain of the first four 'superficial' sessions of the ATSI 12-series.

3) Support - How can we increase support?

Use the increased adaptability to improve support. In bodywork terms, this means using the newly available movement to change the segmental relationships in favour of better alignment and sound functional movement.

This is an essential step to take the client to a new 'home' posture for their

somatic self. Just stretching or opening tissue is not sufficient in itself to make a deep change. They must be a real change in support for them to be able to 'land' in a new place, with new capacities.

This process may begin within the superficial sessions, is definitely a goal of the middle 4 'core' sessions, and often continues into the integration portion, the last 4 sessions of the 12-series.

4) Release - What patterns can be released?

Once support is improved and the body is literally more centred and aligned, we search for the overall patterns that are available for release. The quest for better adaptability and support involves the 'release' of individual structures or fascial sheets, but this fourth principle asks for release in a different sense, release of an overall, body-wide pattern.

Such a release often involves a somatopsychic component. The timing of such an overall release of a pattern cannot be forced or often even predicted, but it can be facilitated and attended to, or it can be blocked by inept handling.

Whatever precipitates it and however 'emotional' it is or is not, pattern releases lead to a fairly radical re-ordering of inner relationships and priorities. Releases can sometimes be accompanied by discomfort and 'teething problems' as the new pattern is adopted, or by a simple sigh of contentment as the body comes back to its new 'home'.

This step occasionally happens early in the series if the person was pre-prepared; it often happens during the middle core sessions or the integration sessions. In some cases, it simply never happens, if the person is not ready for such an inner change.

5) Integration - Where can we integrate changes into functional movement?

Once release is achieved, the final stage or principle in SI is that of integration - the blending of the new pattern into daily movement, life demands, and unconscious posture. Where are the old pattern and new pattern colliding? Where is the old pattern seeking to reassert itself or subverting the new programming?

In this phase, you are assisting the client into living into the new pattern and cleaning up the old, in search of a coherent, sustainable movement pattern that sits easily 'within the skin'.

This is often the most relevant task in the integration sessions, sessions 9 - 12 of the ATSI series.

Weaving these principles in the daily tasks of a session series is complex and manifold, and varies with each client, but it is a recognisable progression.

Working on the 'Support' phase without first increasing adaptability, as in some personal training programs, dramatically slows the rate of change.

Body-centred psychotherapeutic approaches often leave out the 'Support' principle by proceeding directly to 'Release'. Without a new support structure, the new patterning is often lost within a short time and is often confusing to the body.

Release without integration - which can happen with random deep tissue and myofascial release methods - is likewise confusing for the client and sometimes leads to the loss of the new pattern.