

Guided Mindfulness Meditation Activity (15-20 minutes)

NB: Ensure that students have turned off and put away any electronic devices.

Try to use invitational (as opposed to command) language, framing these instructions as *suggestions* rather than orders.

Ideally, after each instruction is read, a small space of silence follows so that students can apply. The silence may feel uncomfortable for some. The times listed here are merely suggestions- feel free to gauge what your individual class needs.

1. We begin by sitting comfortably, with your spine as straight as possible, either in chair or cross-legged on a cushion. (30 seconds – 1 minute)
2. Closing the eyes, take a few deep breaths, and feel the points of contact between your body and the chair or floor. Notice the sensations associated with sitting—feelings of pressure, warmth, tingling, vibration, etc. (1-2 minutes)
3. Gradually, we become aware of the process of breathing. Pay attention to wherever you feel the breath most clearly—either at the nostrils, or in the rising and falling your abdomen. (1-2 minutes)
4. Allow yourself to rest in the mere sensation of breathing. There is no need to control your breath. Just let it come and go naturally. (1-2 minutes)
5. Every time your mind wanders in thought, gently return it to the sensation of breathing. We are learning to “hold our seats.” (1-2 minutes)
6. As you focus on the breath, you will notice that other perceptions and sensations continue to appear: sounds, feelings in the body, emotions, etc. Simply notice these phenomena as they emerge in the field of awareness, and then return to the sensation of breathing. (1-2 minutes)

7. The moment you observe that you have been lost in thought, return your attention to the breath—or to whatever sounds or sensations arise in the next moment. We are learning to learn to be with our system, as it is, in the present moment. (1-2 minutes)
8. Continue in this way until you can merely witness all objects of consciousness—sights, sounds, sensations, emotions, and even thoughts themselves—as they arise and pass away. (1-5 minutes)
9. Take a few more long, deep, mindful breaths. Then, when you feel ready, open your eyes. Begin to move the body in whatever way it needs.

Allow a few more quiet moments before opening the space to reflections and observations.

Meditation: Tips and Common Misconceptions

What is meditation? To answer this, it might be helpful to first examine what meditation is **not**:

- Meditation is not about “not thinking.” Thoughts are not our enemy. As the stomach secretes acid, the brain secretes thoughts. Meditation will not get you to stop thinking, but it may change the *relationship* you have to your thoughts.
- Necessarily going to make you “relaxed” (though it may have that effect, that’s not the primary goal. In fact, meditation can bring more stress into your life if you expect that it will remove stress)
- “Zoning out” or “getting high.” Meditation is *not* about creating altered states, but about creating a space where we can experience the *unaltered* state of our minds.

What, then, is meditation? Meditation is:

- a technique to “make friends with ourselves”, by:
- developing the capacity to observe and *witness* our thoughts, feelings, and emotions without getting caught up in them. We do this by:
- Attaching our attention to an object like the breath or other physical sensations. Every time we notice ourselves getting lost in discursive thought, we bring ourselves back to awareness of the breath. This is:
- Simple, but not easy

Sometimes things are going great and we feel very peaceful. Other times not so much. Meditation practice is about being present with the “downs” as much as the “ups.” We are learning to learn to be with our system, as it is, in the present moment, even if that present moment is uncomfortable.

Useful metaphor: clouds passing through the sky.

Awareness= the sky that contains all the “clouds” of thoughts, feelings, and emotions. Simply focus on the breath and watch the clouds come and go. Even hurricanes eventually pass, leaving a pristine sky behind.

Meditation is not just something to practice on the cushion, but something we can apply in every moment of life.

When you feel yourself getting stressed or overwhelmed, take a minute or two to focus on your breathing and watch these “storm clouds” come and go on their own accord. Be grateful that you caught yourself getting caught up; this shows you are developing the “muscle” of awareness!

What to do now?

Practice, practice, practice! You can read all the books in the world about chocolate, but you won’t know what it taste like until you actually take a bite. Similarly, you won’t experience the benefits of meditation without concerted effort.

One final useful metaphor: doctor’s prescription. You’ve got to take it for it to have any effect!