

Mindfulness Practices for Writing

Making mindfulness a part of your writing practice:

1. Pause, check-in and reflect before you write.

- Many writers rush into a writing task, out of impatience. They feel compelled to get something onto the page as quickly as possible. Sometimes this comes from a sense of feeling “behind schedule” and trying to catch up to where they think they should be.
- This approach can lead to frustration and confusion, meaning that writers spend more time backtracking and rewriting.
- Instead, try taking some time before you write to do a mindful check-in, then assess where you are at and what you need to do next. Think about your goal for that writing period, and visualize yourself doing that task. This may only take a few minutes, but it can make a huge difference in your outlook and in the quality of your work.



2. Cultivate and maintain a sense of calm optimism.

- It's a good idea to “check in” with yourself on a regular basis during your writing sessions. Even simple things like making yourself comfortable in your chair and making sure you are not wracked by tension can be helpful. Try to remind yourself to relax.
- To help you maintain your healthy attitude, take frequent breaks (following periods of good concentration, so that you are not rewarding poor concentration with a break!), and make sure you get regular exercise. Staying healthy both mentally and physically is important—and worth the time! Mindful pauses will help too.
- “Take in the good” as often as you can—just deliberately noticing, pausing within and savouring pleasant experiences and small successes.

3. Notice perfectionism, resist its tendencies (i.e. avoid premature editing)

- When you write a first draft, try to focus on the message or point you want to make, rather than choosing the perfect words or phrasing.
- Focus on editing that clarifies your point and moves you forward. If you find yourself rewriting a section several times, set it aside and move on. When you come back to it, ask yourself “What point am I trying to make here?” Try to write it as you would say it or explain it to someone else. You can refine the wording once you have it on the page.

For more suggestions on bringing mindfulness into your writing practice, see Boice (2000).

Sources:

- Boice, Robert (2000). *Advice For New Faculty Members: Nihil Nimus*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
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- Stahl, B. & Goldstein, E (2010). *A Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction Workbook*. Oakland: New Harbinger.
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Simple (But Not Easy!) Mindfulness Practices

1. Mindfulness of the Breath

- Bring awareness to the breath wherever you feel it most prominently in your body (nose, chest, belly or elsewhere)
- Be aware of the sensations of breathing in, and be aware of the sensations of breathing out
- Ride the waves of the breath, moment by moment.
- When attention wanders from the breath, simply acknowledge this and then gently and firmly bring your attention back to the breath.

2. Mindfulness of Thoughts & Thought Labelling

- First, choose an “anchor” for your attention (something you are going to focus on, and repeatedly bring your attention back to).
- When you notice a thought arising and developing in your mind, pulling you away from your anchor, label it “Thinking”. Repeat the label twice to yourself, in a kind, matter-of-fact way, and then allow the thought to just be.
- Bring your attention back to your anchor.
- You can also try using more specific labels, if you can readily identify the type of thought (judging, planning, remembering, fantasizing, analyzing, worrying, imagining, etc.).
- Using a metaphor like the “River of Thinking” may be helpful. We are not trying to stop thinking from happening, but we are trying to cultivate a “witness perspective”: the capacity to watch thinking happening, as if we are watching a rushing river from the safety of the bank.
- If the pace or nature of the thoughts becomes overwhelming, simply return your attention to the breath until you feel ready to resume.

3. Mindful Check-in

- Allow the body to be still.
- Notice that you are inviting yourself to shift from the mode of “doing” to the mode of simply “being”.
- Explore what is present in your physical body (sensations), your mind, and your emotions in this moment, with curiosity.
- There is no need to judge or analyze; if you notice these tendencies arising, simply acknowledge them, and shift back to exploring your body, mind and emotions.

4. 3-Minute Breathing Space

- Step 1- Awareness: Bring yourself into the present moment. Ask yourself “what is present in my body, my thoughts and my emotions in this moment?”
- Step 2 – Gathering: Gently redirect your full attention to breathing, to each inbreath and outbreath in succession...your breath is an anchor to the present.
- Step 3 – Expanding: Expand your field of awareness around your breathing, so that it includes your body as a whole, your posture and facial expression.