

How to Be Mindful

Why Be Mindful?

Many students find mindfulness to be a helpful way to deal with the pressures and expectations of student life. Some students have found that with the use of mindfulness:

- They feel more resilient and are better able to deal with pressure and overwhelming situations.
- Deadlines are met more easily and efficiently.
- Difficult decisions are reached more smoothly.
- Anxieties and worries have less hold and diminish more easily.
- Happier and calmer feelings come to the forefront.
- Life seems more enjoyable, satisfying and interesting.

This handout describes two mini-mindfulness exercises you can try right now. They will give you a (small) taste of mindfulness practice. You can do them by yourself or you can do them with friends, with one of you reading the bullet points out loud while the others meditate. Read slowly, leaving at least 30 seconds between each prompt.

Our minds naturally go in and out of focus. Whenever you've noticed your mind has wandered off (which may happen often), give special attention to the moment when you become aware again—be curious about it, relish it. Then, decide afresh what you wish to do—whether to come back to the exercise or to stop. You may also decide to spend time with your thoughts and daydreams. A common misconception is that unintentionally drifting off is a mistake; whereas, in fact, it's part of the process of calming down.

Everyday Mindfulness

Being mindful means being aware. Being aware is the first step to being yourself at your best. Being aware, you can make considered and creative choices in your day. However, mindfulness is not a sharp, self-critical kind of awareness. When we “mind” someone or something, we feel genuinely caring and appreciative. Here is one way you can practice mindful awareness in everyday life.

- Pause wherever you are, whatever you are doing—stop for a few moments.
- Look around you. Notice what you see with fresh eyes.
- Listen gently to the many sounds, far and near, high or low, rough and smooth.
- Notice your sense of touch and smell. Become alive to all your senses.
- Feel “from within” how your body feels and moves. Do this in a kind way without trying to change it—it is just how it is right now.
- Sense your feelings and emotions without trying to solve or understand—they have their reasons for being as they are.
- Gently acknowledge what you find: “Here I am,” or “This is what’s here.”
- As you go back to your usual activities, notice if you feel any different.

Becoming Aware: Meditation with Breathing

One mindful approach is to follow your breathing. You may find it easier if you close your eyes. You are not trying to sleep, and you may even feel more awake. Sit upright in a chair and make yourself comfortable. There is no one right way (the effect will be different because your body posture affects your mind). You may wish to set a timer for five minutes, doing less if you want to stop or more if you wish. Create a quiet, calm space before you begin by turning off your phone, laptop, radio or TV.

- Keep yourself warm with muscles and joints uncrossed and in a position where you feel relaxed, yet alert and alive.
- Let your eyes close when they wish or stay open and softly focused.
- Spend time settling and arriving, sensing your whole body.
- Gently let your attention rest with your breathing—even if that is very subtle or hardly noticeable.
- Breathe naturally.
- Sense the way your body responds and moves as you breathe. Is there a part of the breathing cycle or a place in your body where you feel aware of your breath (e.g. your belly, your nostrils)?
- Is there a part of the breathing that you particularly enjoy?
- If your mind wanders off, simply come back to your breathing. It is common that you have to bring yourself back to the breath multiple times during a meditation session.

Mindfulness Apps

- Insight Timer
- Calm
- Headspace
- Stop, Breath, Think