

MINDFULNESS FOR WRITERS HANDBOOK



We don't sit in meditation to become good meditators. We sit in meditation so that we'll be more awake in our lives.

~Pema Chödrön

Definition of Mindfulness from Jon Kabat-Zinn:

“Mindfulness means paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgmentally.”

Meditation Time

- Aim for 12 minutes at least, as this is when the neurological benefits of rewiring your brain and all those good mind/body benefits kick in.
- Don't let perfect be the enemy of good - 2 minutes is better than none! The key is consistency. Shoot for 5-7 days/week, ideally habit stacking so you combine it with another habit that you do at the same time every day. (I like to meditate before lunch. You might meditate before your shower. Etc.) This makes consistency easier.
- **Hold your seat:** Whatever time you choose, stick with that. Also stick with the meditation practice you've chosen, rather than switching up your approach when you experience discomfort or boredom.
- No guilt meditation: the world / your loved ones need you to meditate!
- If you fall off the wagon, just start up again: "We can always begin again." Just like writing.

Objects of Meditation / "Anchors"

- Keep coming back to your object of meditation (anchor). This is a resting place for your mind.
- Breath
- Sounds
- Hands on your thighs / Physical Sensations / Feet on Ground/mudras
- The 5 Senses / Sound only / Body sensations
- External object (tree, palm of hand, candle, etc.)
- RAIN
- Lovingkindness
- Walking: the feel of your feet on the ground or of your body moving
- Koans and phrases such as the "Who am I?" inquiry / mantras

Anchoring The Breath

- Nostrils
- Heart center
- Belly

Avoid depending on guided meditations. Use them as a treat or for extra support.

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Posture

- Sitting, walking, standing, or lying down - WHATEVER IS GOOD FOR YOUR BODY.
- If you're on a cushion, your legs are crossed however you wish, hands on thighs, balanced on your sitz bones, with the knees lower than your hips
- Roll your shoulders back and imagine a string being gently tugged at the crown of your head. Your spine is stacking - I like to imagine a regal, elegant posture.
- The jaw is relaxed, chin slightly turned down.
- The tongue is relaxed, the tip resting just behind the top teeth.
- The mouth is slightly open - you can even play with having a slight smile, which actually improves mood (try it!).
- "upright but not uptight" / dignified, regal posture
- The belly is relaxed - a nice big fat belly.
- If sitting on a chair, feet are flat on the floor, the back is supported, and your hands rest on your thighs.

The Breath

- Breathing naturally through the nose only
- Following the breath as it breathes in the body
- We're not deep breathing here. We're just curious about our breath, hanging out with it.
- Note: The breath is not neutral, so if you have respiratory issues or breathing triggers a trauma response, choose another object of meditation for your practice to anchor you.

Gaze

- Eyes are either closed or open.
- If they're closed, keep a soft gaze about three feet ahead of you.
- If you're getting too sleepy or your mind is really wandering, keeping your eyes open might be most supportive.

If You Get Tired, or Feel Unwell

- You can stand up if you're tired, standing naturally and relaxed but good posture.
- If you're really struggling with sleepiness, then just let yourself fall asleep. Give your body what it needs. As you practice more often, you will be less sleepy.
- Laying down is always an option if in pain - just watch out for getting too sleepy.
- All modifications you need for support are welcome.
- You should never be in pain. You can work with discomfort, but if you are in pain, feel free to move. Just do so with mindful intention.
- Emotions will arise and that's okay, but if at any point it becomes overwhelming or too much, offer yourself some lovingkindness and pause on your meditation. Seek support from a meditation teacher if this is a regular occurrence. Meditation is never supposed to traumatize you.



Working With Thoughts

- Observational Distance / Being the "observer" or "watcher" of your thoughts
- Becoming a friend to your mind
- Labeling "Thinking" or "Thought"
- Counting
- Returning to your object of meditation
- Remember: **Thoughts are not the enemy!** The brain's job is to think and as a writer you've trained it for story. So just note the discursive thoughts neutrally, and then return to your object of meditation.

Dissolving Thought Visualizations

- Sky Mind, thoughts as "weather" as you "sit like a mountain" - let the "clouds" of thought pass by
- Thoughts as leaves floating down a river
- Soap bubble that you brush with a feather
- "Mind Glitter": Thoughts as glitter floating to the bottom of a shaken jar
- Thought as a pebble dropping to the bottom of a river or ocean
- Whatever works for you! Just be consistent and don't let it turn into entertainment.

Lovingkindness (Mēttā) Meditation

The phrases are the same for everyone. Visualize them (including yourself) and "send out" these messages to them. "Tonglen" is another sending out practice to explore on your own.

Lovingkindness for Writers

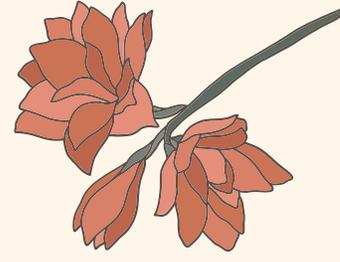
- May I/we be happy
- May I/we be healthy
- May I/we be safe
- May I/we be inspired

Order of People To Send Lovingkindness To

- Yourself
- A beloved being (someone - including pets! - that makes your heart smile)
- A teacher
- A neutral person
- A difficult person
- Radiate to all beings - you can get creative here!

Practices Off The Cushion

- The Pause
- 4-8-12 Breathing
- Mindful eating, drinking, washing dishes, etc.
- RAIN
- Pockets of silence



The R.A.I.N. Method

- **Recognize** you're having an emotion
- **Allow** the emotion to be present, non-judgmentally (**Acknowledge** is also a good word, if Allow doesn't feel good to you)
- **Investigate** the physical sensations of the emotion - don't get into the story line. If thoughts intrude, return to the object of meditation, which is the physical sensation the emotion manifests in your body. Stay with this as long as you need to, until it dissolves at least a little.
- **Nurture** yourself: Give yourself some lovingkindness, or put your hand on your heart and breathe. You can say an affirmation, prayer, whatever.
- This can be done on the spot or on the cushion, as a longer practice.

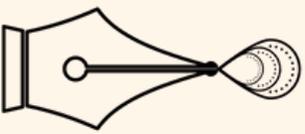
4-8-12 Breathing

- This calms down the parasympathetic nervous system if you do it for about 2.5 minutes, which for me is about 10 rounds. The key is having a longer exhale than inhale - that's where the magic is.
- Breathe in through your nose for 4 counts
- Hold for 8 counts
- Breathe out of your mouth for 12 counts
- Box breathing or other counted breaths are great too if this formula doesn't work for you! Just make sure the exhale is longer than the inhale - this is what relaxes your system.

Mindfulness Concepts off the Cushion

- Non-binary: Nothing is "good" or "bad" - we approach everything with neutrality and curiosity. **Everything is welcome.**
- "Skillful" or "Not Skillful" as opposed to the binary of good/bad
- The "second arrow": first arrow = clean pain, second arrow = "dirty" pain and unnecessary. The 2nd arrow is your storylines, worry, anxiety.
- The Hungry Ghost - clinging & aversion
- "Is it making waves in your mind?" / "mind waves"
- Dropping the storylines
- Listening to your body - consider the work of Martha Beck around the essential self, shackles on/off, etc.
- Comfortable with uncertainty
- Emotion: "There is anger in me" vs. "I am angry." = non-identification
- Thich Nhat Hanh: "habit energy" & "inter-being"
- The present moment as your "teacher" and everything as "practice"

Recommended Reading: Radical Acceptance (Tara Brach), The Monkey is the Messenger (Ralph de la Rosa), The Little Book of Being (Diana Winston), The Miracle of Mindfulness (Thich Nhat Hanh), The Pen and The Bell: Mindful Writing in a Busy World (Brenda Miller & Holly Hughes), Tea and Cake with Demons (Adreanna Limbach)



MINDFULNESS FOR WRITERS

Writing Cave

- Setting up a "container" for your writing practice, just as you do with meditation - an environment conducive to the practice (flow and focus)
- "Neil Gaiman Rules" - you can sit or look out the window
- Phone on airplane mode or out of the room entirely
- Setting boundaries around your creativity with yourself and others
- Meditating before writing for flow and focus
- Walking meditation between writing sessions

Mindful Writer Mindset

- Using labeling, 4-8-12, The Pause, and other tools in the writer's seat to work with the inner critic, self-doubt etc.
- Give yourself lovingkindness as needed in the writer's seat
- Sitting with whatever's coming up in the present moment. Not clinging to the "good stuff" or resisting "tough stuff" that comes up.
- Meditation works our resilience muscles and ability to hold our seat in the writer's seat - see this as a part of your writing practice, not separate from it.
- Changing the genre of your thoughts
- Checking in with the body, your inner compass, the essential self: trust your gut
- Mindful social media
- The more empathy you give yourself and develop for others on the cushion, the more this will reflect on the page.

Writing Practice

- Haiku (a Zen practice)
- Natalie Goldberg's "writing practice" as outlined in *Writing Down The Bones*
- *The Pen and the Bell* book exercises (Brenda Miller & Holly Hughes)
- *Writing as a Way of Healing* (Louise DeSalvo)

You Have A Process

- Work to understand YOUR writing process so that you can be mindful and intentional about it and learn to trust it when you get stuck.
- See my website for doing this work together.

Poetry

- Reading poetry (and writing it) is a wonderful way to access mindfulness as a writer and train your mind to pay attention and slow down.
- For a Haiku practice (highly recommended), see both Natalie Goldberg and Clark Strand to get started

Recommended Reading: *The Pen and the Bell* (Brenda Miller & Holly J. Hughes), *Seeds From a Birch tree* (Clark Strand), *Writing Down the Bones* (Natalie Goldberg), *A Swim in a Pond in the Rain* (George Saunders - a Buddhist!), Mary Oliver's collected poems, Joy Harjo, Tracy K. Smith, Rumi, Whitman, whatever poets speak to you!



MINDFUL MINDSET

Working Mindfully With Limiting Beliefs

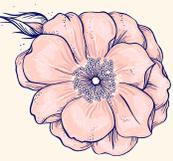
- Control: Notice when you're trying to control a situation or your thoughts and bring curiosity to the situation. No judgement.
- Notice your person "red flag phrases" such as "I should" and note them just as you would thoughts in meditation. Simply noticing phrases that trigger our inner critic helps take away its power.
- Recognize that your inner critic is a part of you that's trying to protect you. Give it some compassion, note its presence, then work on dissolving.
- Use tools like 4-8-12 etc. in the writer's seat or other areas of your life when overwhelm occurs.
- Use shackles on / shackles off and the Martha Beck Inner Teacher practice
- If you're thinking of not meditating, try not doing it for a week and see how you feel. See how you treat others. See what others say about you and your behavior - it will get you right back on the cushion.
- "Expectations lead to disappointment." - Anne Lamott
- "Noticing": Simply notice the thought patterns you have, take pauses when you realize you're not in the present. Pay attention to the world around you. Notice physical sensations, get in the body.
- Work with the Be / Do / Feel / Have Formula. [Blog post here.](#)

Recommended Reading: Atomic Habits (James Clear), The Way of Integrity (Martha Beck)

Mindful Tech

- Disable notifications on your phone.
- Be aware of how you participate in the "attention economy" and consider discontinuing, limiting, or setting healthier boundaries in your use of social and online media. Notice how your body and mind react to the constant stream of content and stimulation.
- Limit podcasts and other constant audio stimulation.
- Are you giving yourself silent pockets throughout the day to increase your creative bandwidth? Remember, creativity is two different ideas formed to make a new one - this can't happen when you are constantly playing podcasts, music, talking on the phone, on social, and otherwise multitasking with tech.
- Throw away your Apple watch. :)

Recommended Reading: How To Do Nothing (Jenny Odell), Burnout (Emily and Amelia Nagoski)



MINDFULNESS FOR BUSY PEOPLE & MAMAS

Meditation Everywhere

- Car Meditation - get to school pick-up early and meditate, meditate during lunch breaks, etc. Drive without audio in the car.
- Public Transportation: Meditate on sound, do lovingkindness for yourself and everyone in the space, plug in headphones and do some guided meditation
- Laundry, dishes, cooking soup, gardening: These aren't meditation, but you can bring mindful attention to these activities and use the physical sensations and the work itself as your object of meditation.
- Find pockets of silence and enjoy them as much as you can. See the "mindful tech" section for more on this.
- Bathroom Meditation: Take a mindful bath or shower, focus on the sensation of water and soap as you wash your hands, sit on the toilet and do a pause (ahem - when you're not doing your business)
- Park Bench Meditation: Take your lunch break outside, or do walking meditation
- If you have an office or private room to use at work, bring a little doorknob sign - get one made on Etsy! - and put it on there before you meditate. No shame in your game.

Kids & Meditation

- If they are old enough, have the gongs on your timer be something they know about: they can't bother you after the first one goes off, and they're free to bug you after the second one. If they do interrupt, don't open your eyes and calmly ask, "Are you bleeding? Is there an emergency? If the answers are "no," tell them to wait for the second gong. **Be consistent with your boundaries.**
- If you have a partner, book a time each day where they watch the kids so you can meditate.
- Meditate with your kids! Headspace has some really fun ways to do this.
- Normalize your practice. Give it a fun name. "It's Mommy's Chill Out Time!"
- Be gentle with yourself. It's hard to be a mama. You can always try again tomorrow.

Recommended Reading: When Things Fall Apart (Pema Chödrön), Eff This! Meditation (Liza Kindred)

INSPIRATION



Attention is the beginning of devotion. - Mary Oliver

I exist in continuous creative response to whatever is present.

- Martha Beck

Dismiss whatever insults your own soul. - Walt Whitman

Practice until you make it a song that sings you. - Sue Monk Kidd

The mindfulness we need is inclusive and meets people exactly where they are. It is exactly what we need to carry ourselves into this time and to navigate what we are up against right now. Mindfulness isn't the answer to everything but it can be the foundation.

- Rev. angel Kyodo Williams

We can always begin again. - Sharon Salzberg

Wherever I am, the world comes after me.
It offers me its busyness. It does not believe
that I do not want it.

- Mary Oliver

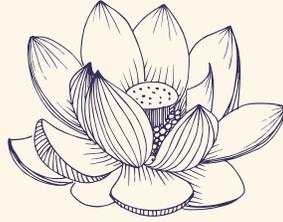
The future is completely open, and we are writing it moment to moment.

- Pema Chödrön

Almost everything will work again if you unplug it for a few minutes, including you. - Anne Lamott

Imagination is better than a sharp instrument. To pay attention, this is our endless and proper work. - Mary Oliver

I am rooted, but I flow. - Virginia Woolf



Who am I in the midst of this thought-traffic? - Rumi

I have to come back to beginner's mind, the first way I thought and felt about writing. In a sense, that beginner's mind is what we must come back to every time we sit down and write...Each time is a new journey with no maps.

- Natalie Goldberg

Buddhism is not a religion, it's a science of the mind. - the Dalai Lama

Sensations in the body are ground zero, the place where we directly experience the entire play of life. - Tara Brach

Only when you drink from the river of silence shall you indeed sing.

-Kahlil Gibran

It's just a ride. - Amanda Palmer

In the beginner's mind, there are many possibilities, but in the expert's there are few. - Shunryo Suzuki

I wish I could show you
When you are lonely or in darkness
The astonishing light
Of your own being.

- Hafiz

How we spend our days is of course, how we spend our lives. - Annie Dillard

Instructions for living a life: Pay attention. Be astonished. Tell someone about it. - Mary Oliver

I am larger than I thought. I did not think I held so much goodness.

- Walt Whitman



NOTES



Are you looking for a writing coach to help you on your journey?

Let's Connect



heatherdemetrius.com

Resources, Offerings, Blog,
Mindfulness for Writers, and
Inspiration



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wellness.



Heather Demetrius is a critically acclaimed author, writing coach, editor, and teacher. Her books include *Little Universes*, *Code Name Badass*, and *I'll Meet You There*. Thousands of writers meditate with Heather on her Mindfulness For Writers Insight Timer page. Visit www.heatherdemetrius.com to learn more about Heather, her books, and her offerings for writers.

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