

Meditation Exercise for Student Writers and Others

This is an optional exercise. It was taught to me by one of my teachers and I highly recommend it. If you try it and don't like it, then by all means stop. But I have found that it tends to make people, including me, more relaxed, productive and creative even though initially it can feel like a "loss" of time (20 minutes).

Purpose

Students face all sorts of stresses in their busy and complicated lives as they respond to school, work, and home-life pressures.

Writing, in particular, can allow stress to rise to the surface because when people write they

usually do so in less distracting environments, and this is when they often notice whatever stresses they may be feeling. "Writer's block," a feeling of being frozen when one first faces the blank page or computer screen, is similarly an anxious response to pressure and tension. While stress is an inevitable part of life and can even add to one's creativity, students are rarely offered training at school in how to deal with stress when it becomes overwhelming and psychologically disruptive. Students may forget that they are not alone in facing such common and very human feelings; feeling alone, in turn, often merely adds an overlay of anxiety to stress.

Meditation techniques can help with such stresses and anxieties. In meditation, one goes psychically inward and attempts simply to notice whatever one is feeling, without adding any layers of judgment to that feeling. By getting in touch with one's emotions, being attentive to the body's signals, and remembering to be loving and accepting towards oneself and others, one's own healthy relaxation responses kick in as one reestablishes a sense of personal equilibrium and perspective. Meditation also allows the unconscious to "speak" in its own unexpected ways, potentially releasing creative ideas and energy.

Method

There are many forms of meditation, from assuming the double lotus posture for hours and chanting mantras to short "sitting" exercises. Here is what I recommend.



W. Kandinsky, Sketch for "Composition II," 1909-10

First, download a brief meditation tuning fork-based musical piece called “Moses Code Meditation,” by Jonathan Goldman (it is part of the *I Am Wishes Fulfilled* album by Wayne Dyer and James Twyman, but you need not buy the whole album). You can get this on iTunes or in another online or offline music store.

Now find a quiet place to lie down and use headphones to listen to the music. While you are listening, you can let your mind wander, or you can do one of these exercises:

- Think about all of the positive motivations for doing what you are doing as a student (such as interest, responsibility, joy: you can choose your own), and let go of any negative motivations (such as guilt, fear of consequences for not doing it, risk of the negative judgment of one’s parents or oneself, etc.). Keep focusing on these positive motivations until you begin to really feel them.
- Stage a debate between two “parts” of yourself, such as the part that wants to accomplish something and the part that wants to procrastinate (or to judge). Ask the procrastinating part to explain its reasoning, and listen carefully. Is procrastinating a protection against the risk of failure? Is it a way of distracting oneself from complicated emotions having to do with success or failure to live up to one’s ideals? Suggest to the procrastinating part of oneself that you understand its motives, but that you are going to find other ways to deal with these issues – ways that are more self-affirming.
- If you tend to turn off your emotions under pressure and then get confused about what you are feeling, spend the meditation time exploring your feelings by imaginarily going “into” the part of your body where the most painful feelings manifest themselves. Touch that interior part of yourself with imaginary hands, and let your body know that you are not ignoring these feelings but are instead trying to come to terms with them.
- Remind yourself that a world without guilt, without punishment of oneself (or others), is possible. Remind yourself to forgive your errors and to love and accept yourself fully.
- Most of all, enjoy the music. It is probably not the kind of music you listen to in other contexts, and you may not like it at first. But give it a chance: although one might not describe it as “great music,” it is music that skillfully uses tuning forks to create an effect on you, or with you, in a different way.

Try this exercise today. Repeat it tomorrow. Repeat again. See how you feel after a week or two.

—Lincoln Z. Shlensky