MINDFULNESS EXERCISES

This list is a compilation of common contemplative exercises. The original sources are listed in the bibliography found at libguides.hollins.edu/tilec2016

Movement:

Mindful break: after a period of discussion, allow students to get up and stretch, or walk slowly and quietly around the room.

Walking meditation: stand still comfortably, focusing on the experience of your feet grounded against the earth. Walk normally, noticing carefully how it feels to walk. Notice your soles against the earth, contacting and releasing. Be aware of the different sensations in your feet, ankles, knees, etc. Notice the feelings of clothing and air on skin; notice which muscles are tense, and which are loose. Notice stray thoughts; they’re not bad or good, they simply are. Go back to noticing walking.

Contemplative walking brings the focus to the body’s experience of moving. Movement can (but does not need to be) combined with mantra or prayer.

T’ai chi and Yoga are both contemplative movement practices.

Meditation:

Meditation is focused, contemplative inquiry into one’s own sensory experience, without judgment.

In a relaxed seated or lying position, breathe deeply while focusing your mind on the act and experience of breathing. Without judging, notice any stray thoughts and let them go, returning the mind to the breath.

Variation- sound meditation: after settling into a regular breathing pattern, focus the mind on outside sounds. Notice the sounds of the space around you: their strength, duration, and other qualities. Shift the focus to the sounds inside you, any sounds coming from your own body.

Variation - body scan: after settling into a regular breathing pattern, focus the mind on your left foot: notice without judgment or action any sensation in your foot. From there, shift to the left lower leg etc. Work your way through the entire body, one part at a time.

Variation - emotional regulation: after settling into a regular breathing pattern, focus the mind on your thoughts and in particular your emotions. Observe them just as events happening in your mind: you don’t have to worry about them, judge them, or do anything about them in any way. Notice them, let them come and then go. Observe them as events happening in your mind.

Beholding

Beholding is contemplative seeing: meditation through close, concentrated and repetitive observation. In a relaxed seated position and breathing comfortably, look closely and carefully at a familiar object, image, or person. Do this for an extended period of time. Note everything you can see as if you are noticing it for the very first time, focusing on detail: shape, color, texture – sharp or soft; lightness or shadow. The goal of this practice is to increase your ability to pay attention non-judgmentally. If you find yourself assigning value in any way, observe that as an event and then let the thought pass.

Don’t do anything except really notice the thing you are looking at – without attaching meaning or judgment. Simply breathe, and relax into your contemplation: look at it as if you are seeing it for the first time. Visually explore every aspect of its formation. When new thoughts arise, simply notice them as events in your consciousness – bring your mind back to the image.
**Deep Reading:**

Deep reading is reflective and close reading of short sections of important text.

“Contemplative reading naturally reveals the reader’s own personal lived experience relevant to the text.”¹

Alone: Prepare with 10 minutes of mindful attention to the breath. Read the text several times, keeping your focus on the text and managing any distraction non-judgmentally. When the reading is completed write for 10 minutes, reflecting on the reading.

Group: Prepare with mindful attention to the breath. One person reads a passage out loud; next, go around, everyone sharing one or two thoughts about the passage. If appropriate, follow up with group discussion.

Combination: Read a passage, and reflect on it quietly for a few minutes. Next, share a sentence or two with a partner, exchanging just a few things you’ve each noticed or thought. After your exchange, reflect for another minute or two. Finally, write down your thoughts.

**Reflective Writing:**

Reflective writing works by cultivation of awareness, focus and the quiet mind required for contemplation of the issue at hand. Students can write to contemplate a topic, or to access their inner experiences and feelings. In a course where mindfulness is also a topic, they can also write to reflect on their own mindful practice.

After experiencing information (through lecture, discussion, viewing a film etc.), share the information in silence for a few minutes. Then take time to write, reflecting on what’s been shared. The quiet contemplation and writing can be followed by sharing and discussion.

Variation – reflective journaling: Before reading, spend 10 minutes preparing with breath-focused mindful attention. Allow this mindful attitude to remain as you read. After the reading and another breath-focused practice of 10 minutes, write no more than one page describing how the reading relates to your personal experience. Be specific. Describe anything you noticed about your experience during the reading. (from Bush & Barbezat, Contemplative Practices......)

**Deep Listening:**

Listening outward: start with breathing meditation. Once you are focused and aware of your breath, start turning your focus outward to sound. First, observe the sounds inside you. Then move to the sounds closest to you – people near you, sounds in your immediate environment. Slowly let your listening expand outward. Keep breathing.

Variation – deep listening with a partner: After a reading, viewing, or class discussion, partner up for deep listening. It starts with you listening for a few minutes to your partner, without asking questions or reacting to what you’re hearing in any way. Just listen. Thank your partner; then repeat your partner’s thoughts back as best you can. While you’re doing this, your partner may correct anything she wants to about your reflection of her speech. Then reverse: your partner will practice deep listening, while you speak.

**TIPS**

- Silence is an opportunity for internal experience that will deepen your involvement; so is closing your eyes.
- Students are helped when you explain the purpose of exercises beforehand, and give them the opportunity to reflect on their experience afterward.
- Not everyone has the same level of comfort with instructions for meditative or physical activity. Using phrases such as “I invite you to...” or “If you’re comfortable with it” helps students approach the non-familiar, or helps them to opt out when they are uncomfortable.

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