

MINDFULNESS TIPS FOR EXAM STUDENTS

Mindfulness can help you to focus and stay calm by encouraging you to return your attention again and again to what you are doing right now instead of getting lost in the stories your imagination tells you or in stressful emotions. To practice mindfulness, try these tips:

- When stressful thoughts come into your head, silently label them with the word "thinking" and return to what you are doing. Returning frequently from your imagination to what you are doing is the key to mindfulness.

- Every now and then, notice one complete out-breath and notice also how the breath seems to go through your feet into the floor. This focus on the out-breath has been used successfully by Irish Olympic athletes.

- Every time you notice an hour has passed, breathe in to a count of seven and out to a count of eleven. Giving more time to breathing out has a calming effect on the nervous system. If your mind drifts away when you are doing this, simply label it silently with the word "thinking" and return your attention to the breath.

- Now and then become aware of your posture. This works better for some people than mindfulness of breathing.

- Whenever you feel anxious, move your attention away from what your mind is telling you and instead notice the physical sensation of anxiety in your body. Your mind can keep its stories going forever but physical sensations die down, sometimes quite quickly.

- If you are feeling agitated and you go for a walk, put your attention on the feeling of your feet on the ground and keep bringing your attention back to this until you are calm. Mindful walking is a very old mindfulness practice and is especially good if you are too agitated to use other mindfulness practices.

- Remember that planning and fantasy are two different things. So when you are making a study plan or planning how to answer a question, keep bringing your attention back to your planning whenever you notice your mind has pulled you into a fantasy or into worries.

- If you lie awake worrying at night, try doing the body scan and you will increase your chances of getting back to sleep. This means becoming aware of your body from your toes to the top of your head in stages. For instance: Toes, feet, calves, thighs, lower back, upper back, chest, stomach, arms, hands, shoulders, neck, head, face, throat. You can pace yourself by counting two or three breaths between each stage. You'll find a brief body scan in the audio section (see below) but you can make it last for as long as you like.