

# Thriving In Action Training Manual

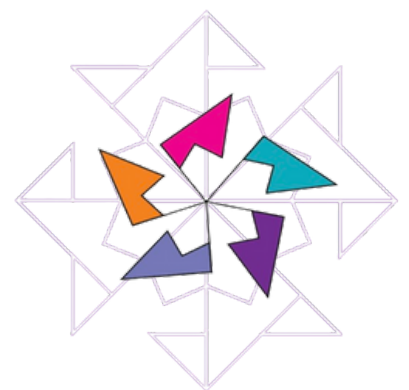
Second Edition 2024

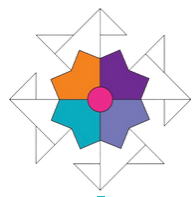
Dr. Diana Brecher &  
Venus Bali

**Toronto  
Metropolitan  
University**

**ThriveTMU**

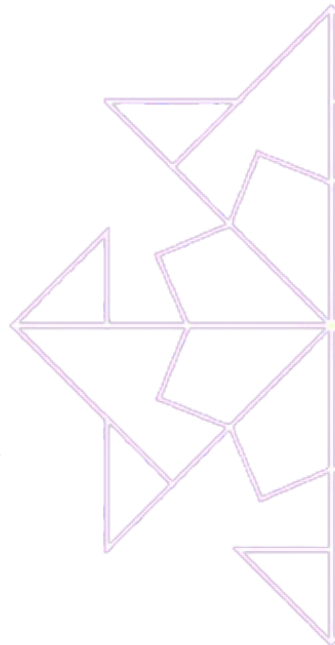
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# Foreword

It's funny what happens to one's perspective as we get older. It widens. We see the long view. And so it is with my perspective as an educator, a career that has tumbled for many years on the ever-blowing winds of educational thinking. Education is a discipline especially prone to opinion, trend, and faddish mania over this buzzword or that cliché. And, when we have been around long enough, we start to discern those features of pedagogy that, no matter the flavour of the day, appear again and again as good, effective, meaningful, authentic, those features of pedagogy that dependably engage, teach, and improve the lives of students. And, often, it's the simplest things: good teachers with genuine intentions, engaging content, an attentiveness to instructional beauty, and safe but challenging spaces to gather with students. These things transcend the fads. They are always necessary. If I were to reduce the idea of learning to a formula, it would simply be this:

*Learning = information + experience + meaning.*

*Information* - processing, filtering, curating, selecting, critically evaluating. In a world where information is ubiquitous, the teacher's job is to do this.

*Experience* - designing situations that have inherent and immediate value, imbued with an ethic of care where students are safe to take intellectual and emotional risks. In a world of deeply conflicting values, it is the teacher's job to do this.

*Meaning* - facilitating a slow process of reflection to extract/make meaning. In a world that favours speed and productivity, it is the teacher's job to do this.

**Thriving in Action (TiA)** embodies all of this. It is a program meticulously and thoughtfully developed by inspired educators who understand deeply the relationship between students' well-being and the development of their craft as effective learners. In this TiA instructor's training, you will be guided through the thinking behind this program and the ways in which it ought to be facilitated. You will be in the hands of the very educators who have so expertly developed the TiA program, and I have no doubt you will find something valuable here to bring back to your places of teaching. Recently, a student participant of TiA said to me, "I understand my purpose as a student more clearly because of TiA." I can scarcely think of better praise than that. It is a program that cultivates agency and improves the lives of students. Period. So we offer this training with our best wishes that it can be similarly successful with your students.

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**John Hannah** (2017). Director, Special Projects *Toronto Metropolitan University, First Edition.*

# Preface

The Thriving in Action program is a response to students who express not only something to the extent of, “I’m not doing very well,” but alongside this, “I’d like to do better.”

It is an upstream intervention to reach students before distress sets in; it is an invitation for students to equip and empower themselves with bolstering academic and life skills that can help mitigate crises.

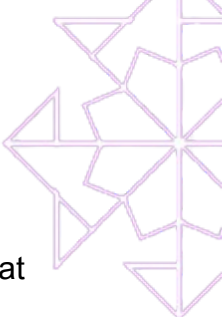
It is innovative in the buffet offered, weaving thriving essentials that support living a good life, chiefly the building blocks of resilience, with progressive and whole-person learning strategies.

It is group-based, firm in the belief in un-siloing student stories, even if sorrowful; in combatting loneliness with togetherness; in collectively celebrating student triumphs, from the nuanced to the transformative; in building confidence through strategy-sharing; and in ensuring sustainable, flexible programming from the outset.

It is nonjudgmental and unapologetically didactic. No assumptions are made about students’ prior knowledge, what was or wasn’t highlighted in their upbringing or school years, states of readiness up until now, exposure to resilience modelling, or the attempts made or interruptions experienced along schooling journeys. Instead, Thriving in Action levels the playing field takes luck and natural talent out of the equation, and lays bare helpful tips and tools for academic success and well-being through direct and buoyant teaching.

It enacts the Universal Design of Learning from the most complex learners. The thriving skills taught have emerged from decades of counselling students navigating deeply troubled waters; the learning strategies were created and curated from working with students with challenging disabilities. Thriving in Action is, thus, informed by students for whom memory, comprehension, and attention, for example, have been profoundly impacted. The result is a program relevant for all.

It is committed to learnability, practiceability, and improvability; these are skills that anyone at any age can acquire.



It is a transition program that recognizes that orientation, or reorientation, can come long after the first year. It is, in fact, the initial hurdles and struggles that provide the insight that propels students into Thriving in Action.

It supports the movement from surviving to thriving. Thriving in Action is for all students who are no longer at the beginning but somewhere in the muddy middle, motivated by a desire to change, who are not doing very well.

Thriving in Action is about the art and practice of being a student.

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**Dr. Diana Brecher, C. Psych.** Scholar-in-Residence, Positive Psychology *Toronto Metropolitan University, Thrive TMU, Community Wellbeing*

**Venus Bali, MSc.** Thriving in Action Specialist  
*Toronto Metropolitan University, Thrive TMU, Community Wellbeing*

# Land Acknowledgement

We wish to acknowledge the land upon which all Thriving in Action sessions were taught and resources created:

“Toronto is in the ‘Dish With One Spoon Territory.’ The Dish With One Spoon is a treaty between the Anishinaabe, Mississaugas and Haudenosaunee that bound them to share the territory and protect the land. Subsequent Indigenous Nations and peoples, Europeans and all newcomers have been invited into this treaty in the spirit of peace, friendship and respect.”

This acknowledgement of the land has been adopted by Toronto Metropolitan University and approved by the TMU Aboriginal Education Council.

Chi Miigwetch (Thank You)

# A Note of Gratitude

When we published the first edition of this manual in December 2017, Diana Brecher and Deena Kara Shaffer thanked the following people: John Austin for his love and fostering of innovation. John Hannah for his insight, trust, and guidance. Tesni Ellis, Donica Willis, and Sarena Johnson, thank you for helping to make our hopes and words sing through their storytelling gifts. Christina Halliday, Allan MacDonald, and Marc Emond, thank you for supporting the Thriving in Action pilot launch in February 2017. And, John Meissner and Larry McClosky, for their generosity of spirit.

It has been seven years since we published the first edition. Diana Brecher and Venus Bali would like to thank Allan MacDonald, Executive Director, Student Wellbeing, and Lee Hodge, Director of Community Wellbeing, for their ongoing support of this and all of our initiatives; our Career Boost students, Mehul Bhagat and Sara Meechan, for their creativity, design, editorial and technical skills; and our TiA Alumni, who have inspired us to keep growing and responding to their needs. And finally, we thank our community stakeholders for trusting us with their students.

# Introduction to ThriveTMU & Thriving in Action

ThriveTMU is a campus-wide resilience initiative developed by Dr. Diana Brecher, Scholar-in-Residence, Positive Psychology, in 2016. At the heart of ThriveTMU is a Five-Factor Model of Resilience comprised of gratitude, optimism, self-compassion, and grit, with mindfulness at the very core. Since its inception, Diana has continued to offer resilience training to students, staff, and faculty across campus. She then developed a broader [curriculum](#), including topics such as habit formation, character strengths, and the importance of sleep; she taught these topics to students as guest lectures and co-curricular workshops.

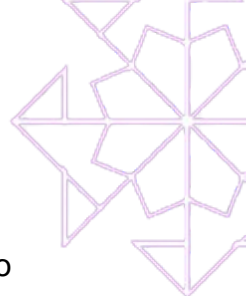
Within the ThriveTMU umbrella, the Thriving in Action program, co-created with Dr. Deena Kara Shaffer in February 2017, is a key 'spoke' or branch. Thriving in Action is a 10-week program that innovatively blends essential thriving skills (grounded in evidence-based research from positive psychology) with holistic learning strategies. Venus Bali joined the team in September 2021 as a Learning Strategies Specialist.

Diana and Deena adapted the Thriving in Action curriculum into a credit course in the Faculty of Arts, which they have been teaching every term since Winter 2020, reaching over 758 students as of December 2023.

Resource development is another crucial aspect of the ThriveTMU initiative:

1. [Thriving in Action Online](#) - scaling up the Thriving in Action curriculum so that anyone can access these resources at their own pace without needing to attend our program in person.
2. Cultivate Your Happiness: A ThriveTMU Weekly Workbook, editions [one](#) and [two](#) (2016, 2023). The first edition focuses on thriving skills. Each week, we provide students with a different exercise designed to build resilience in the face of challenges they experience throughout the semester. Key themes of the exercises include nurturing new friendships, practising presentness, enacting generosity, trying out new coping skills, and exploring forgiveness. The second edition is a blend of thriving and learning strategies, co-authored with Venus Bali, organized into weekly exercises for each week of the academic year.





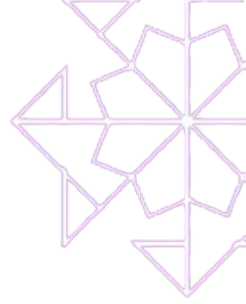
3. [A Facilitator's Resource Manual](#). This companion provides additional resources to teach students the Cultivate Your Happiness Workbook, first edition.

4. [The Four Seasons ThriveRU Weekly Workbook](#). This workbook covers 52 weeks of thriving exercises on the same 13 themes for faculty and staff.

Guest lectures have also been provided across the campus and in a range of disciplines on such topics as character strengths, giving feedback in service of resilience, and developing a flourishing relationship with graduate thesis supervisors. We offer these [workshops](#) to students through various partnerships on numerous topics, including Ten Top Tips to Thrive at TMU, Flow, Freedom from Fatigue, Micro-Resilience strategies, Procrastination and Building a Joy Kit.

Writing for Wellness, a monthly journaling program offered to staff and faculty, integrates numerous Positive Psychology topics based on the ThriveTMU curriculum into writing prompts.

# Learning Outcomes



By the end of the Thriving in Action program, students will be able to:

- Explain how and why wellness activities like exercise and meditation directly impact academic success.
- Demonstrate increased awareness and enactment of their intentional decision-making and action-taking.
- Articulate and experience a greater degree of academic success, including but not limited to increased GPA, engagement and confidence.
- Utilize the Five-Factor Model of Resilience to bounce back from at least one challenge.
- Incorporate the Five Features of Wide Awake Learning to bolster academic confidence.
- practice at least two new Thriving in Action strategies.

## Arc of a Session

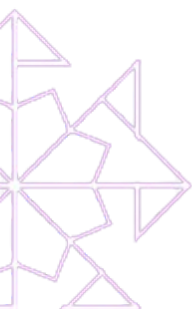
While the content of the Thriving in Action curriculum may vary somewhat from session to session and group to group, every meeting has a parallel arc.

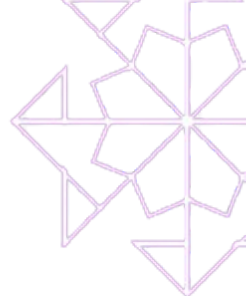
Each Thriving in Action class flows as follows:

- “What Went Well and Why” group sharing and discussion of the week’s progress
- Thriving Strategies
- Writing prompt, linked thematically with the week’s core teachings
- Circle of Joy mindful movement
- Learning Strategies
- Meditation/guided visualization

## How to use this Manual

This manual is an offering of how we have been running Thriving in Action thus far at Toronto Metropolitan University. To be sure, we will continue to experiment with content, timing, and structure; new studies and our own research will help us reconsider, reshape, and refine. Yet right from the get go, and with every cohort since its inception, students have articulated its resonance and helpfulness of this program, and as such, even with this fluidity and expansiveness, we wish to share this program.





In each chapter, you'll find an opening that shares our ideas behind the theme of that week's lesson and how to teach it.

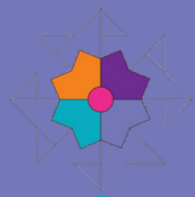
This is followed by a series of Handouts we provide students - the Thriving Strategy exercises, the Writing Prompt, and the Learning Strategy tips, for instance.

## **The Purpose of Prompted Writing: Mid-Session Free-Writing Breaks**

Halfway through each Thriving in Action session, we invite the students to free-write following the thriving lessons and before the learning strategy teaching. Each week, a new writing prompt is offered. Most have been borrowed or modified slightly from the insightful exercises created or adapted by Dr. Natalya Androsova, former Writing Programs Specialist in TMU Student Affairs' Student Learning Support department.

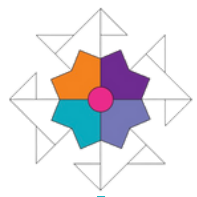
We write together to shift and clear the energy, putting aside the previous hour and refreshing our readiness to learn for the second hour. We write to move from listening to active creation. We write as a practice of quieting our inner critic. Students are reminded each week to leave concerns about grammar, expression, and “sophisticated” or “academic” language behind. So many of our students have essays or labs to craft yet wrestle with procrastination or perfectionism in getting their ideas on paper. So, we write as an exercise in producing words on paper. ‘Getting it all out on paper’ is a technique students can utilize when in the throes of frustration, rumination, or anxiety. We write to discover what we're really feeling by attending to what emerges on paper. We write to discover our authentic voice.

And, as Natalya would offer — drawing on the inspiration she takes from Bonnie Goldberg, Peter Elbow, Julia Cameron, Natalie Goldberg, Louise DeSalvo, and Susan Zimmermann — we write in Thriving in Action as an invitation for students to discover their amazing powers of reflection and insight. Through these prompts, students learn practical ways of using writing as a vehicle for well-being, flourishing and personal growth. They learn to use writing to support themselves in times of stress, replacing stress with resilience. These timed and reusable writing prompts are ideally written by hand for four or five minutes. Students do not share their pieces but instead keep them for private reflection. The only instructions are: Don't think or criticize your writing. Don't worry about grammar or form. Don't reread or correct. And don't stop until the time is up.”

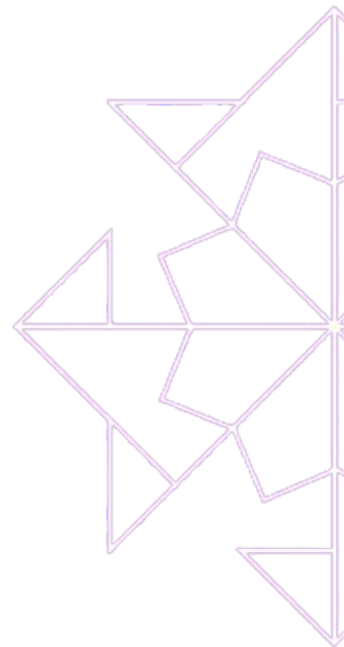


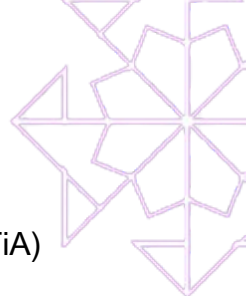
# Thriving in Action Weekly Curriculum





# Week 1





This first week starts with personal introductions and launches the Thriving in Action (TiA) program, including co-cultivating community expectations. Our core expectations, for example, comprise kindness, resisting comparisons, preserving the dignity of each person, and refraining from sharing stories outside of the group. This initial lesson teaches students to tap into willpower and build a new habit. We then introduce the importance of sleep as a learning strategy and identify its importance to overall physical and mental health. Following a writing prompt that lets students visualize what they intend to leave behind and carry forward, they are led through the [Circle of Joy](#) (a 5-minute mindful movement exercise) and then introduced to five progressive learning strategy essentials.

This session provides students with a sense of beginning, sets the program's positive and hopeful tone, and introduces students to TiA's holistic approach.

### **Week 1 Includes:**

- Thriving Strategies: Building a New Habit & the Importance of Sleep
- Writing Prompt: Packing a Suitcase
- Circle of Joy
- Learning Strategy: A Strong Start—Top Five Learning Strategy Tips & Tools

### **How to Teach Week 1:**

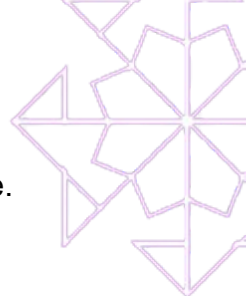
## **Thriving Strategies: (Habits and Sleep)**

### **Building a New Habit**

Did you know that 43% of our daily behaviours are automatic? We engage in some behaviours repeatedly without thinking about it. These are mental shortcuts, where the reward/pleasure/sense of accomplishment reinforces us to repeat the behaviour until it becomes automatic.

Wendy Wood (2016), a social psychologist and the world's top researcher into habit formation, identifies four components of habit formation:

1. The context (where, when, who, and how the behaviour happens).
2. The reward (the pleasure or sense of accomplishment you get from doing it).
3. The routine (the behaviour itself).
4. Friction (could be any or many of these components: proximity, barriers, timing, and effort).



Shawn Achor (2010) refers to the importance of friction and calls it the 20 Second Rule. Think about the obstacles that interfere with getting a task done. Create a clear path between you and your desired behaviour by eliminating the first 20 seconds of these obstacles. Conversely, when you want to stop doing something, insert 20 seconds of friction. For example, if you're going to start running every morning, move your alarm across the room, sleep in your running gear, place your running shoes by the bed, and when the alarm goes off in the morning, you are already dressed, put on your shoes, walk across the room and turn off the alarm and you are ready to go.

Charles Duhigg (2012) describes Keystone Habits. Like the keystone in a bridge that holds it all together, a keystone habit is a behaviour that, once acquired, becomes a pathway to changing other behaviours. Common keystone habits for students are - daily meditation, attending classes, getting a good night's sleep, organizing your day or your meals in advance, and exercising regularly. Engaging in any of these behaviours will make other changes much more straightforward.

### **Duhigg (2012) identifies these six steps to building a habit:**

1. Change your context
2. Reward yourself
3. Crave the reward
4. Practice the routine multiple times
5. Announce your intentions
6. Ask for support

### **And Duhigg provides two hacks to make it easier to build your habits:**

**Stack your habit** - take advantage of an existing habit and link the new behaviour to the habit. For example, if you always brush your teeth after breakfast (the existing habit) and want to start drinking more water (the desired behaviour), you can fill a glass of water and have it right next to your toothbrush. The visual reminder is all you need to engage in the behaviour. Once you repeat it often enough - it will become automatic.

**Swap your habits** - replace a 'bad' behaviour with something more aligned with your goals. As part of your bedtime routine, instead of scrolling on social media before turning off the lights, try creating a 30 - 60 min buffer zone between the hectic day's events and bedtime - through meditation, a hot bath, stretching, writing in your journal, or listening to peaceful music.



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\*Examples of how to apply the 20-Second Rule <https://www.youtube.com/watch?>



# Curriculum

## Thriving Strategy Exercise: Building a New Habit

### Starting a New Habit

Friction is an essential component to habit formation. Shawn Achor recommends not counting on willpower alone to accomplish our intentions, as willpower diminishes as the day progresses. Instead, remove the first 20 seconds of obstacles between you and the task. The inverse is also true: if you want to stop doing something, create 20 seconds of obstacles to avoid engaging in the bad habit you are trying to break.

### **Worksheet: Changing a Habit: The 20-Second Rule**

A. The new habit I want to start or stop is

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B. What obstacle(s) can I insert that will help me?

---

or

C. What obstacle(s) can I remove that will help me?

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### Identifying Cues

1) **Context:** What will trigger me to get started each time? Where, when, who, and how will the behaviour happen?

List three things.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

2) **Reward:** (the pleasure or sense of accomplishment you get from doing it).

Define the Rewards

What pleasure do I feel if I do (or don't do) the behaviour?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

\*Note: the pleasure can be intrinsic to the activity (i.e., the reward is built into the behaviour), or it can be extrinsic to it (you pair the activity with something you enjoy and only do it then). For example, walking on the treadmill every morning is boring and tedious, but if you watch your favourite streaming show while exercising and only while on the treadmill, you begin to associate the pleasure of your favourite show with the behaviour you're trying to build. Eventually, exercise on the treadmill will become automatic, and you will have built a new habit.

3) **Routine** (the behaviour itself).

Identify what the new behaviour looks like and do it. Be specific regarding frequency, duration, location, etc.

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4) **Friction** (proximity, barriers, timing, and effort).

Make sure you are either removing or inserting friction to accomplish your goal.

**Creating a Habit - Summary:**

1. **Anticipate and desire the rewards** (let this craving motivate you and make you feel disappointed if you don't get the reward).
2. **Do the routine** (repeat the behaviour until it becomes automatic). Multiple times.
3. **Announce your intentions** (you are more likely to keep repeating the habit if someone else knows you are trying).
4. **Ask for support** (study buddy, exercise pal, encouragement from the community or someone important to you). Ask for what you need.

# Sleep as a Learning Strategy

Why is sleep essential to our well-being?

Dr. Matt Walker, a neuroscientist, refers to sleep as the Swiss Army knife of health. Getting enough sleep regularly has a significant positive impact on our well-being, and when we don't get enough sleep, we struggle.

Adequate sleep (7 - 9 hours for the average adult) contributes to a robust immune system, mental health, and cognitive health as we age. In his [TED talk on the neuroscience of sleep](#), Dr. Russell Foster describes the benefits of deep sleep on our capacity to focus, learn, remember, make decisions, be creative, make friends, and experience well-being. Sleep also decreases moodiness, stress, anger, and impulsivity. Interestingly, sleeping deeply even lowers alcohol and nicotine use.

What are the benefits of a good night's sleep?

## SLEEP IMPROVES OUR CAPACITY TO

- deal with stress.
- maintain a healthy immune system.
- curb our appetite.
- maintain healthy blood pressure and cardiovascular health.
- protect cognitive function as we age.

## SLEEP DECREASES

- Moodiness
- Stress
- Anger
- Impulsivity

## IMPACT ON COGNITIVE FUNCTIONING

- When we sleep before we learn something new, it enables us to absorb and imprint new memories into the brain.
- While sleeping, we can take memories from short-term memory to a more permanent long-term storage site (future-proofing that information).
- REM sleep leads to a threefold increase in creativity and problem-solving by integrating new information with what we already know.

*How can you know if your sleep pattern is interfering with your well-being?*

In [Carney & Manber's book, "Goodnight Mind"](#) (2013) pose these questions to help assess our sleep patterns:

- How many hours of sleep do you typically get on the weekdays? Weekends?
- How many mornings a week do you typically wake up refreshed? Most mornings? Occasionally? Never?
- Do you wind down before bed?
- Do you do any of these activities in bed? Eat or drink? Text? Talk on the phone? Watch a streaming service? Work on to-do lists? Study? Write assignments? Worry?
- How often do you nap or doze off without planning?
- How often do you use the snooze button?
- How often do you pull all-nighters?
- In what ways does your sleep pattern shift when you aren't actively taking classes, like on holidays or during periods of regular work hours?

This self-assessment can help students identify their current routines and motivate them to change.

*What is happening in the brain while we are sleeping?*

Most people assume that while we are unconscious, nothing is happening. This, of course, is incorrect.

During **light sleep**, our muscles relax, our temperature drops and our brain waves slow. These all enable us to remain asleep. An added benefit of light sleep is that if we wake up during the light sleep stage of our sleep cycle, we feel rested, more awake, and refreshed, which often occurs during a brief nap (about 20 min).

The most restorative sleep of the night, **deep sleep**, typically starts about 35 to 45 minutes after first falling asleep. It is instrumental in helping us to store and recall information. During the day, our hippocampus stores new information learned, and during deep sleep, we organize and store this information in our long-term memory.

**REM** stands for rapid eye movement; its first cycle starts about 90 minutes after falling asleep and lasts 10 minutes. Later in the night, REM sleep lengthens, with the final REM cycle lasting up to an hour. REM sleep is when we dream, sometimes leading to creative breakthroughs and inspirations. Dreams can offer insight and solutions to problems and increase our ability to make sense of feelings and experiences.



## Curriculum

Thriving Strategy Exercise: Honouring the Body Clock (for productivity and a good night's sleep)

Our days have three distinct stages: Peak, Trough (low point) and Recovery. These affect both our mood and performance. There are three chronotypes (types of sleepers):

- Morning Lark - tired by 9:30 PM and up by 6:30 AM (20%).
- Third Bird - tired by 11 PM and up by 7 AM (60%).
- Night Owl - tired by 2 AM and up by 10 AM (20%).

### Morning Larks

- You have difficulty staying awake at night.
- You wake up much earlier than others, often without an alarm.
- You feel most mentally alert in the mornings, and this declines in the day into the evening.
- You become sleepy earlier than most (before 10:00 PM).

### Third Birds


- You get tired at about 11 PM.
- You wake up at about 8 AM, often with an alarm.
- You feel mentally alert in the mornings.

### Night Owls

- You have difficulty waking up in the morning.
- You dislike eating in the morning.
- You feel mentally cloudy in the morning.
- You feel your best in the evening or at night.
- You become sleepy much later than most people do (long after midnight).

Morning Larks and Third Birds follow the same pattern of Peak in the morning, Trough in the mid-afternoon, and Recovery in the late afternoon. However, night owls experience the opposite pattern.

[Daniel Pink's book "When"](#)(2018) suggests that the key to success is to tap into your most productive time (your peak) and do the most challenging work at that time.



Like the surfer who rides the wave, identifying your natural energy levels and choosing the most appropriate task for that time of day (or night) results in less effort and higher productivity. Knowing this information is particularly helpful for both Early Birds and Night Owls, normalizing what they have been experiencing and giving them permission to honour their chronotype and do their best work in the early mornings or late at night, respectively.

**During your Peak hours** - do complex analytical work (writing a report, analyzing information, planning a complex process, focusing intensely on new material). You are often in a good mood.

**During your Trough**, do administrative tasks like email, scheduling, and organizing your desk. You are often cranky or irritable.

**During your Recovery**, brainstorm and do creative work because you are looser and more flexible in your thinking. Your mood improves when engaged in creative thinking.

### Getting to sleep

These are the critical strategies suggested by [Carney & Manber in “Goodnight Mind”](#) (2013) to ensure a good night’s sleep:

- Set a regular rise time for both weekdays and weekends.
- Stay in bed long enough to get the sleep you crave without lingering in bed.
- Go to sleep during your optimal sleep window (when you are tired).
- Exercise earlier in the day, well before sunset.
- Limit caffeine to the morning and early afternoon (especially if you struggle with insomnia).
- Reduce the use of screens at night.
- Keep your room temperature right for you (not too warm).
- Create a buffer zone to slow down and transition to sleep time.
- Commit to relaxation activities that help you unwind.
- If you cannot sleep, leave the bed and return when sleepy.

Two additional strategies that can be very helpful in transitioning to sleep are:

1. Create a **buffer zone**: 30 to 60 minutes before bed, slow down, disengage from schoolwork or other screen-based activities, and relax. Options include reading a book, stretching, meditating, writing in your journal, or taking a hot bath or shower. All of these can make it easier to fall asleep.
2. Go to sleep **when you are tired** (during your optimal sleep window) and honour your chronotype. Avoid social jet lag (staying up later than your body would prefer).



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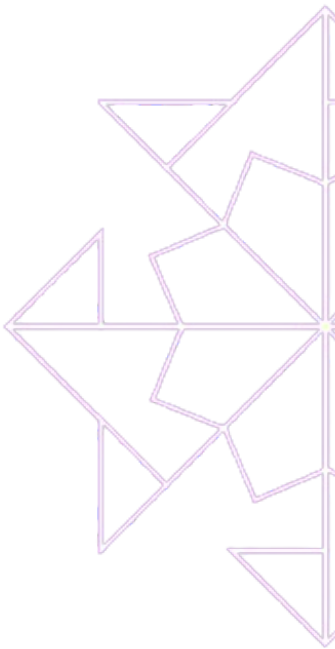
## Writing Prompt:

You wake up rested... Finish the prompt in any way you're moved to. Write non-stop for 4 minutes.





# Learning Strategy



## Week One: Top Five Learning Strategies

1. Mindful time management
2. Task analysis AKA chunking
3. Prioritization
4. Uni-tasking
5. Pomodoro method and constraints

### Mindful Time Management

To support students with time management, it is essential to provide space for them to reflect on where their time is going. In week one, we discuss how there is usually a disconnect between the number of hours students think they have free and the actual hours that are free in their day and week. We emphasize that students usually work with fewer free hours than they think.

Provide students with the opportunity to predict how many hours they have free in a day and a week. Ask them to write their prediction down. Then, if time permits, provide a printout of a weekly calendar like the one provided on the next page. Get students to block out when they are busy beyond their classes. Ask them to cross off the times that they are commuting, preparing food, eating, hanging out with friends, doing part-time work, etc. Anything consistently happening in their day and week should be accounted for.

If students would prefer to do this digitally in Google Calender, there is a step-by-step guide by creator Amy Landino on [Youtube](#). We also discuss the importance of having a consistent space where students can write down their deadlines or capture important information they can review regularly.

*Please note: All other strategies related to mindful time management build upon a proper understanding of how many hours students are actually working with.*

# Mindful Time Management Worksheet

**Step 1:** Use the space below to write out how many hours you think you have free in a day and a week.

Predicted number of free hours in a day (on average): \_\_\_\_\_

Predicted number of free hours in a week: \_\_\_\_\_

**Step 2:** In the weekly calendar below cross off all the time slots when you are busy. Include, all the recurring tasks that are happening (i.e., commuting, preparing food, class, labs, work, volunteering, and etc).

**Step 3:** Calculate the number of free hours you actually have in a day and a week and record them below.

Actual number of free hours in a day (on average): \_\_\_\_\_

Actual number of free hours in a week: \_\_\_\_\_

### Weekly - Hourly Planner

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
7:00-8:00							
8:00-9:00							
9:00-10:00							
10:00-11:00							
11:00-12:00							
12:00-1:00							
1:00-2:00							
2:00-3:00							
3:00-4:00							
4:00-5:00							
5:00-6:00							
6:00-7:00							
7:00-8:00							
8:00-9:00							

## Task Analysis AKA Chunking

Task analysis, also known as chunking, discusses the importance of breaking larger projects and assignments into smaller pieces. Some students may have challenges getting started, while others may face difficulties with solid execution.

This strategy provides a gentle nudge to begin for students who find getting started the most challenging part.

For students who have never broken an assignment into smaller pieces, we explore digital assignment planners ([University of Toronto Scarborough](#), [Waterloo](#), [Toronto Metropolitan University](#), [Humber](#)). We use the UTSC to go through an example as a group. Going through step-by-step what goes into an assignment can ease the friction associated with getting started. For all assignment examples, when broken down, the first step always remains consistent in understanding the assignment.

We emphasize the importance of taking 15-20 minutes to review the syllabus/course outline to understand the expectations of the assignment. Students who want a step-by-step guide for this can use [SPARK's "Understanding the Assignment Checklist"](#).

Once we run through an example, it is highlighted that usually an assignment comprises at least 10-12 steps. By providing a visual reference of what goes into an assignment, we also discuss how this can help mitigate procrastination. Instead of students thinking they can move this one assignment to the next day, they can better understand that it now consists of 10-12 other steps. This perspective shift can support students in learning how to adjust their schedules.

## Prioritizing

Since students have many competing tasks and responsibilities, we explore three tiers of methods to support prioritization.

### Tier one prioritization: Adding structure to their to-do list

Many students are familiar with and comfortable with creating to-do lists. This strategy is helpful when students are used to making a to-do list where they have done a mind dump of all the things that need to happen but then encounter decision paralysis regarding how to get started. To structure this, we ask students to simplify their to-do list into things that need to happen now vs. later. If this additional step creates too much friction, they can take a highlighter and highlight 1-3 tasks that need to happen now. One to three things is usually a manageable number for the brain to digest, making it easier to gain momentum.

## Level 1 Start Simple

Now	Later
Try to list ONLY 1-3 items here	

### Tier two prioritization: Dump and sift method

For students who want a step-by-step guide on making sense of their tasks and tracking the time it takes to complete them, we discuss the "dump and sift" method. The Ted Rogers School of Management (TRSM) at Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU) created [this fillable worksheet](#) to guide students through a process: first, they do a mind dump of all their tasks; then, they use a three-level prioritization system where they classify their tasks into A, B, or C columns; finally, they identify their top one to three tasks and estimate the time they think it will take to complete them. This time estimation step is handy for students who want to learn how to create a more accurate schedule moving forward.

### Tier three prioritization: Eisenhower Matrix

For students who would like to explore an alternative method for prioritization, we briefly discuss the "dump and sift" method within the context of a matrix. We provide examples of various tasks that students may encounter and explain the significance of importance and urgency. Students can create this matrix in their notebooks, either physically or digitally. Some students have even used masking tape on their walls and placed their tasks on post-it notes, allowing them to move them around as needed. It's worth noting that this approach may not support students who haven't practiced it, as they may inadvertently place everything in the urgent and important category. Therefore, it's helpful to walk through some examples to ensure understanding.

	High	<b>URGENCY</b>		Low
<b>I M P O R T A N C E</b>		<b>1</b> Urgent and Important Do it NOW	<b>2</b> Important not Urgent Decide when to do it	
		<b>4</b> Urgent not Important Delegate it	<b>3</b> Not important not Urgent Dump it	
	Low			

To strengthen the muscles of focus and concentration, we discuss how multitasking is a myth. To improve the quality of their work, students will likely benefit from practicing uni-tasking, focusing on one task for a period before switching to another. We also state that when switching between tasks, it can take up to 20 minutes to refocus on the task at hand (Mark, Gonzalez, & Harris, 2005).

Exercise: To practice uni-tasking, we invite students to reflect on the number of tabs they have kept open on their computer at any given time. The next time they consider opening a new tab, we encourage them to pause and consider whether it's necessary.

## Pomodoro Method and Constraints

We discuss how the Pomodoro method can scaffold uni-tasking. Traditionally, the Pomodoro method involves 25 minutes of work followed by a five-minute break, repeating this cycle, and then taking an extended 10-15 minute break. When presenting the Pomodoro method within TiA, we emphasize the importance of adapting learning strategies to meet students where they are. For those trying uni-tasking for the first time, we suggest starting with 10-minute work intervals and five-minute breaks. The emphasis is on having the work interval longer than the break.

We explain that they can set up these intervals on their phones or explore them on YouTube. Many YouTube creators also have playlists of "work with me" videos that follow the Pomodoro method.

Constraints resonate with students who feel they can only get started when motivated by a deadline. We discuss how students can use their own schedules to simulate deadline-driven behaviour. The suggestion is for students to examine their schedule and identify a task or a step related to an assignment they can schedule immediately before another obligation. For instance, if they have a class at 2 pm, they would schedule a task for 20 minutes before they need to leave for their commute or 20 minutes before logging into their class. The key is to schedule a task they can complete in 20 minutes before they must attend to an obligation where they are accountable to someone else, such as a professor in a class. This strategy can help students overcome friction with tasks on which they procrastinate.

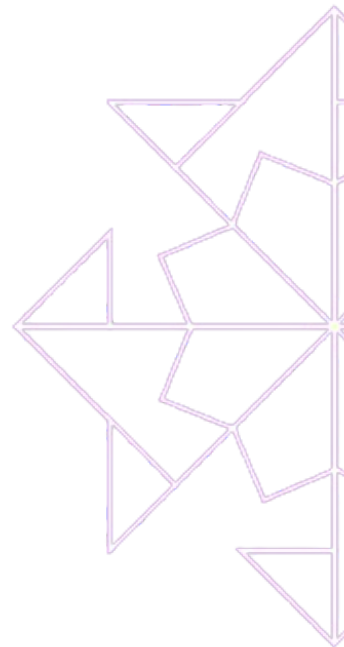
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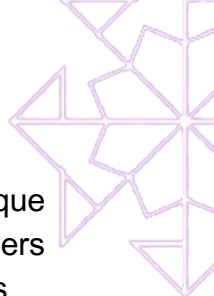
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# Week 2





This second week focuses on ‘tuning in,’ helping students to attune to and mine their unique strengths, as well as their context and environment. After “What Went Well?”, which furthers group community-building and individual confidence through sharing successes, students discuss their character strengths and how best to utilize their most notable abilities. Thriving in Action is rooted in ‘leading from one’s strengths,’ this session brings these to the forefront. Students are led through a writing prompt that has them visualize heightened strengths, followed by a learning skills lesson on the crucial skills of studying.

## **Week 2 Includes:**

- Thriving Strategy: Leading From Strengths & Unpacking VIA Character Strengths Survey
- How to Teach “Tuning In”
- Writing Prompt: Inventing a Superpower
- Learning Strategy: Studying

## **Thriving Strategy: Leading from Strengths & Unpacking the VIA Survey**

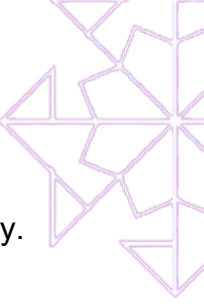
We all have character strengths that enrich our lives and the lives of those around us. Leading from our top five character strengths can become an effective strategy to elevate life satisfaction and success.

Our strengths are the values that we put into action. They represent the best in us and influence how we feel and what we do in most contexts (work, family, community, and social situations).

They form our core identity.

When we become aware of, explore, and apply our character strengths, we feel more engaged and optimistic about our work and personal lives.

The study of character strengths is at the heart of Positive Psychology’s scientific exploration of the conditions and processes that contribute to flourishing or optimal functioning. Under the leadership of Dr. Chris Peterson and Dr. Martin Seligman, fifty-five scientists spent three years doing a literature review dating back 2,500 years. They found six similar themes, or virtues, emerging across these traditions: Confucianism, Taoism, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam. The 24 character strengths named in the questionnaire are organized into these six virtues: wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence.



The data collection occurred across 52 countries worldwide, from Canada to Kenya to Greenland, and indicated very high agreement rates across cultures, locations, and history. They tried to include as many diverse cultures as possible to identify humanity's shared strengths and values in different cultures and religions. Since then, hundreds of research studies have demonstrated the link between the cultivation of these strengths and well-being.

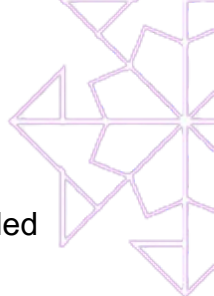
Research done through the [Values In Action Character Strengths Survey](#) identified seven strengths associated with academic achievement: optimism, gratitude, social intelligence, curiosity, self-control, enthusiasm, and perseverance/grit. Notably, three of these strengths are key resilience factors (optimism, gratitude, and perseverance/grit). Inviting students to explore these strengths can serve several purposes: (1) insights into one's greatest strengths facilitate tapping these strengths when needed, and (2) intentionally cultivating strengths can result in higher self-efficacy and resilience. Let's delve into the six virtues: wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence.

### Which of the character strengths are associated with each virtue?

- **Wisdom:** Creativity, Curiosity, Judgement, Love of Learning, Perspective.
- **Courage:** Bravery, Persistence, Honesty, Zest.
- **Humanity:** Love, Kindness, Social Intelligence.
- **Justice:** Fairness, Leadership, Teamwork.
- **Temperance:** Forgiveness, Humility, Prudence, Self-Regulation.
- **Transcendence:** Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence, Gratitude, Hope, Humour, Spirituality.

### What are character strengths?

- They reflect our positive personality traits.
- They are part of our core identity.
- They are a wellspring of a good life.



Understanding your survey results starts with knowing that character strengths are divided into roughly three groupings:

**Your Signature Strengths** (your top 1–6 strengths on the survey). These strengths are easily expressed, are stable across situations, and are the most engaging and exciting to you. We all tend to talk about our strengths with pride. It is you at your best and what you are known for. For example, if perseverance is your top strength, you never give up at work or school and remain loyal to friends, families, and even a job, even after they have disappointed you.

**Middle Strengths** (your mid-range strengths on the survey, from 7–19). You can draw upon these when needed, often referred to as “Phasic Strengths” because we can activate and amplify these when the current situation demands it, whereas otherwise, they lay dormant. So, for example, a middle strength might be something like courage – that you activate when the context demands it, but otherwise, it doesn’t play an essential role in your life on a day-to-day basis.

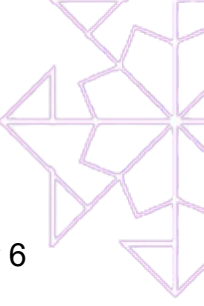
**Lower Strengths** (the items from 20–24 in your profile). You tend to value these strengths less, but you can develop them if desired. For example, creativity may not be your top value or top strength. But, if you need to cultivate this skill to problem-solve at school, work, or within your family, you may tap into your dormant creativity, work at it, and build on it over time.

Ryan Niemiec is the Chief Science and Education Officer at the VIA Institute on Character. He is a researcher and author of several excellent books on character, including [The Power of Character Strengths](#) and [Mindfulness and Character Strengths](#). In his 18-minute [TEDx Talk](#) (2017), Ryan Niemiec describes character strengths as a “universal language that describes what’s best in us.” He used the metaphor of four levels of light to explain how we can interact with our strengths:

**Pilot light** (we have 24 pilot lights – representing our capacity to fulfil our potential for each of these strengths).

**Flickers of light** (sparks within ourselves and in others that can add up to one of these 24 character strengths).

**A beam of light** (when we tap into our strengths and apply them thoroughly in a focused, specific context).

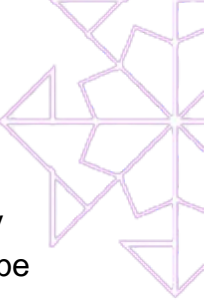


**Full glow** (when we can express multiple strengths in one context or across many contexts). This full glow happens when we tap into our signature strengths (those top 5 or 6 strengths that best describe us.) When we lead with these signature strengths, we feel happier overall.

Niemiec ends the TED talk by saying: “who you are is what you repeatedly do.”

## Thriving Strategy Exercises

1. Take the 15-minute [VIA character strength survey](#) and identify your top 5 strengths. Then, approach five people who know you well and ask them to tell you what they perceive your strengths to be. The easiest way to collect this information is to give them a copy of this [character strength awareness handout](#) to fill out. The goal is to discover if there is an agreement between what you perceive as your top strengths and your community’s perception of you. The insights that result from an agreement about your character strengths (between you and your closest friends, colleagues, classmates or family) can boost the quality of your relationships and self-confidence in your ability to lead with your character strengths. In contrast, significant disparities can enrich and expand your perception and cultivation of your skills and strengths.
2. “Me at My Best,” A Positive Introduction: Tell a story about a time when you were at your best, whether it was a moment or accomplishment. Who was there? What was happening? What did it look like, sound like, and feel like? With which character strengths did you lead? Activate your senses and tell the story to put yourself back in that time and space. Consider which contexts you might want to share this story, perhaps in a job interview or when meeting people for the first time. It’s important to note that some people find this quite uncomfortable and would prefer not to talk about a time when they were at their best. An alternative would be exercise number three, below.
3. Using Strengths to Build Resilience: Think about when you went through a tough time and yet persevered and successfully met this challenge. Review your list of top character strengths and see if you can determine how these strengths helped you overcome this challenge. What did you learn from viewing the story from this lens?
4. Show this [character strengths video](#) and use it to discuss how each of the 24 strengths manifest so differently. A discussion further illustrates the range of strengths we embody and how you can tap into these strengths daily.



5. Strengths Alignment exercise. The purpose of this exercise is to encourage students to use what they know about their character strengths and lead from these strengths as they attempt to accomplish all the tasks associated with their school work. Of course, this can be applied to careers, family responsibilities, or anything else.

Use a sheet of paper split down the middle. Ask students to take a sheet of paper or a word document and split their page in the middle. Ask them to identify the top five tasks they must accomplish next week and list these on the right-hand side of the page. Then, ask students to list their top five character strengths and write them on the left side. Finally, ask them to draw an arrow between each of their character strengths on the list and the task that they are currently applying this strength. Optimally, they will lead from or use each of their strengths on the list with each task. Often, students overuse one or two of their strengths and underuse the rest. If this is the case, a fruitful discussion could follow in which students are encouraged to explore how they could tap into their strengths. Just like choosing to work at peak times based on their chronotype can lead to increased efficiency, performance and ease, intentionally leading from their strengths can bolster the same outcomes.



**Writing Prompt:**

If you want happiness for an hour, take a nap.  
If you want happiness for a day, go fishing.  
If you want happiness for a month, get married.  
If you want happiness for a year, inherit a fortune.  
If you want happiness for a lifetime, help somebody else.  
- Proverb

For this exercise, give yourself any superpower. How could you use it to help someone? Whom would you help and why? What would you do for them?

Choose someone you know or someone you don't know. It can be a friend, a family member, a person you saw on the corner of your street, a person you read about on the news, a colleague who seems a little sad lately, a neighbour, etc. It doesn't have to be one person; you can help a group of people, a family, a country, our planet. There are no limits to using your life to serve something more significant than you. You can start by writing, "If I had a superpower, I would ..."



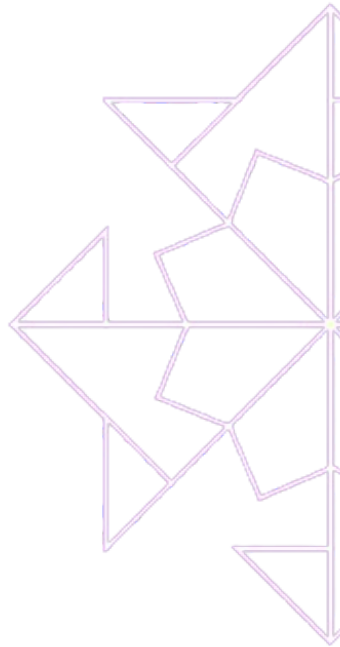
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# Learning Strategy



## Week Two: Studying Effectively

When exploring studying strategies, we begin by discussing the top two strategies most supportive for students trying to understand content on a deeper level. We then reference the infographic on the following page, “10 Learning Techniques which are most efficient,” and highlight that practice testing and distributed practice will be the most effective in learning content on a deeper level and retaining information long-term.

We create a sharing space to see which study strategies students are most familiar with and what they have been using and then segue into our four study techniques for the session.

1. Mnemonics
2. Flashcards and the Leitner Technique
3. Master Memory Sheet
4. Feynman Technique

## HIGH UTILITY



### PRACTICE TESTING

Using practice tests to review information



### DISTRIBUTED PRACTICE

Spreading out study sessions over time

## MODERATE UTILITY



### ELABORATIVE INTERROGATION

Asking yourself "why" as you read



### SELF-EXPLANATION

Generating reasons to explain new information



### INTERLEAVED PRACTICE

Trying out different types of problems when you practice

## LOW UTILITY



### SUMMARIZATION

Summarizing lengthy information



### KEYWORD MNEMONICS

Associating new words with similar sounding words



### VISUALIZING

Generating mental images while you read



### HIGHLIGHTING & UNDERLINING

Emphasizing key points in the text



### REREADING

Reviewing information multiple times

FOR AN IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS OF EACH TECHNIQUE, CHECK OUT THE ORIGINAL ARTICLE



Infographic created by Touro College for Touro's Online Education Blog <http://blogs.onlineeducation.touro.edu>

Source: Improving Students' Learning With Effective Learning Techniques; Psychological Science in the Public Interest; January 2013 vol. 14 no. 1 4-58  
doi: 10.1177/1529100612453266

## Handout

### Strategy one: Mnemonics

A mnemonic is a tool to strengthen your memory and help you recall information—Mnemonics house what you've learned about a topic in words, sentences, pictures, or symbols. Mnemonics may seem simple, but they actually activate critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Memory houses many things, including colours, images, shapes, orientations, sounds, smells, tastes, touch, and emotions. We can use these, particularly those that evoke the most potent memories, to our advantage when studying.

### How to create a mnemonic?

The following techniques connect the information you want to remember with easy-to-recall items.

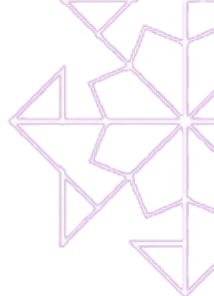
Acronyms (helpful for high volume):

- Write down the list of items/information you want to remember.
- Highlight or underline the first letter of each of those items.
- Write out those first letters, keeping them in the order you wish to remember them.
- Lastly, make a new memorable word or phrase with those first letters.
- For example, to remember the Great Lakes, HOMES stands for **H**uron, **O**ntario, **M**ichigan, **E**rie, **S**uperior.
- Animal classification for Biology, **K**ingdom, **P**hylum, **C**lass, **O**rders, **F**amily, **G**enus, **S**pecies can be remembered as **K**ing **P**hilip **C**an **O**nly **F**ind his **G**reen **S**hoes (or **K**ids **P**refer **C**andy **O**ver **F**ried **G**reen **S**pinach).
- Alternatively, pair common acronyms (especially funny ones) with related info you try to remember: how can you link FOMO, OMG, YOLO, IMHO, and LOL to your studying material?

Can't think of a way to break down a term(s)? [Use the website acronymify.com](https://www.acronymify.com)

Alphabet (helpful for long lists):

- Write down the twenty-six letters of the alphabet, A to Z
- Next, associate one item that you want to remember with one letter of the alphabet and continue; for example, studying the countries of South America becomes A for Argentina, B for Brazil, C for Chile, and so on
- You may need to get creative with finding the link between the letter and the item you wish to remember (consider shape, sound, etc.)



Location (helpful if you have spatial strengths):

- Picture a familiar room or location, associate items you are trying to remember and study with the various items and objects you would find in that space.
- Journey (helpful if you have storytelling strengths):
  - Think of a familiar journey or memorable trip that you can recall vividly and associate items you want to remember with various “landmarks” along the journey/trip.
  - We like to highlight that students may want to use their commute as a study strategy, linking different stops on their journey with content from a class.

More Mnemonic Techniques:

- Recipes/menu-like lists
- Anatomy
- Nature
- People/relationships/historical or famous figures
- Comic/movie/book characters
- Song lyrics
- Significant dates
- City signs/landmarks
- And remember to use humour! (tests can be joyful!)

## Strategy two: Flash Cards

Flash cards help you practice recall. They help you remember distilled or symbolic information (mnemonics) to trigger your memory.

Flashcards hold small amounts of information—facts, formulas, pictures, or symbols—which prompts you to recollect the complete information you have learned and studied. The cards cue you to remember.

They are quick, easy to make, and can even be fun!

Important: Flashcards are part of a thoughtful, well-planned study method. They do not replace attending class, taking notes, or keeping up with reading and assignments.

## Tips

- Keep it short—use point forms and abbreviations.
- Use what works best for you—colours, pictures, symbols, or acronyms.
- Make your penmanship as clear as possible.
- Because they are particular to you, the course, and the assignment, test, or exam, they often will make sense only to you—this is a great sign.

## Why They Work

What you put on the front of the flashcard is like the key to your mental filing cabinet. The cards cue you to remember what you already know.

<p>MNEMONIC (WORD(S)-FORMULA-SYMBOL-ACRONYM)</p> <p>These activate your memory</p> <p>(front/blank side)</p>	<p>Definition(s) Solution(s) Explanation</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <p>(back/lined side)</p>
--	---

## How to Make Flash Cards

1. Buy a pack of index cards. Ideally, they are blank on one side, have lines on the other, and are generally 3" x 5".
2. On the blank side, write the **mnemonic** (acronym, landmark word, formula) you want to remember. Keep it short and meaningful. This will serve as the **trigger (cue) for your memory**. Not sure what to write or draw on this side? Try a **key term, date, or concept** symbolised in a phrase, squiggle, or design.
3. Flip the card over to the lined side and write a brief, bulleted, ultra-accurate definition or explanation. Not sure what to write on this side? Write a clarification, description, or solution of what's on the front in the most compact and meaningful way you can. Remember to use abbreviations and avoid unnecessary filler words.

## How to Study with Flash Cards

- With a blank side facing you—the side you have written or drawn your mnemonic (picture, acronym, formula)—test yourself by seeing if you can remember what’s on the back.
- Review them silently and aloud.
- Separate the ones you get right (you don’t need to study what you already know).
- Spend extra time with the cards you find difficult to recall what’s on the back (write out 5x, speak out 5x, explain them 5x, then try to recall again).
- Use the Leitner Technique to create five separate piles.
- Pile one: review every day.
- Pile two: review every other day.
- Pile three: review once a week.
- Pile four: review bi-weekly.
- Pile five: Retired.

All flashcards begin in pile one, and every time they are answered correctly, they graduate to the next pile. If at any point the flash card is answered incorrectly, it will go back to pile one. The aim is to get all flashcards to pile five.

### Additional Flash Card Strategies

- Consider colour-coding what you write/draw on the front to link shared ideas.
- Chunk them into smaller packs, studying 7 to 10 cards at a time.
- Bring intentionality to your studying by using your flashcards in specific locations, marrying the content with the place on your commutes, and aiming for short, alert bursts of focused study.
- Shuffle and study out of order to up the challenge and reinforce retention.
- Swap them with a peer and test each other.

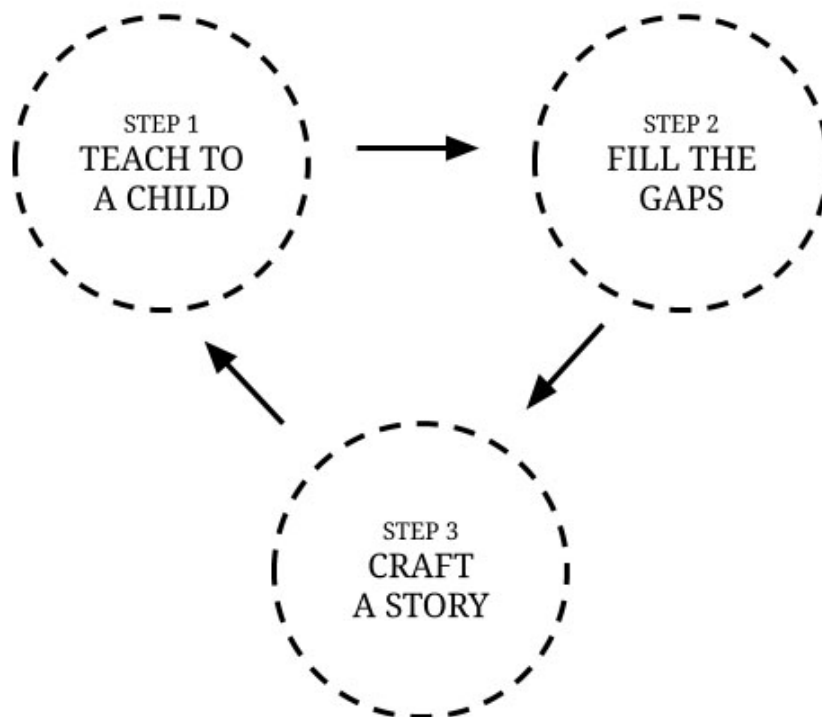
Note: We discussed that making flashcards can be time-consuming, so this is best used when spread out over the semester. It may be good for students to think about creating one to five flashcards at the end of every class to keep up with the habit.

## Strategy Three: Master Memory Sheet

This is a study strategy that you can use throughout the entire semester or one that can also be used when short on time. The master memory sheet is discussed as a tool for students to identify what they've learned versus what needs more attention. Begin your study session with a mind dump of the specific chapter or content you want to study. Write out everything you remember about the chapter. Then, once you have written everything you remember, identify the content that didn't make it onto the page and to concentrate your study efforts on the things that didn't make it onto the page. This process can help you use your time efficiently as you don't continue to go over the same content in chronological order. This can be helpful when you have a few days or hours to study and can also be a tool you can use at the end of each week to check your understanding of the presented content.

## Strategy Four: The Feynman Technique

The Feynman Technique is a method of studying that involves checking your understanding by trying to teach a concept to a child, identifying any gaps you find when talking out loud to describe this concept, and crafting a compelling story. Since you are more likely to remember meaningful stories, crafting a story gives you creative freedom to connect content to something you find interesting.





## A brief note on multiple-choice questions

- If you are unfamiliar with multiple-choice tests, do as many practice questions as possible! Contact your professor or teaching assistants during office hours and find resources for test bank questions. Practice really does make progress in building confidence with these types of questions.
- Read the question stem (paragraph/prompt) with your hand over the answer choices.
- Underline/circle the game-changing keywords (directions, all/some, always/never, opposites).
- Articulate clearly the correct answer in your mind (see it, hear it).
- Uncover the answer options and find the one corresponding to your mental answer.

We end with a discussion of studying by emphasizing that it's helpful to:

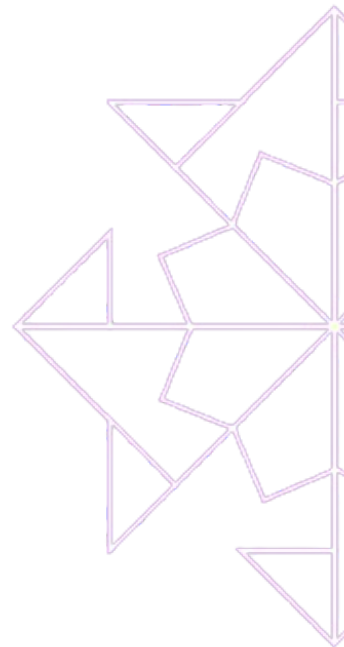
- Break your studying into chunks using a tool like the Pomodoro method.
- Focus your studying on what you don't know vs. what you already know.
- Have nourishing breaks where you can return to your studying re-energized. Usually, this means taking time away from screens or at least 50% of your break away from a screen and doing something to be present in the body or, if possible, getting fresh air and going for a walk.

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# Week 3



## Thriving Strategy: Grit & the Personal Model of Resilience:

We are all resilient in the activities we love the most. We find a way around obstacles and persevere despite them. In her book [Grit](#), Angela Duckworth (2018) defined grit as passion and perseverance for long-term goals. It requires courage to manage your fear of failure, conscientiousness (about your goals), the ability to bounce back after setbacks (resilience) and letting go of the need to be perfect (and be your best self instead). How can we tap these strategies and attitudes when faced with challenges we don't typically approach with curiosity and passion? When do we demonstrate grit and perseverance? How can we tap those skills and strategies in service of our really tough times?

Persistence in an academic context depends on more than interest in your choice of program or talent in meeting the program's demands. It demands resilience (mindfulness, gratitude, optimism, self-compassion, and grit). [Angela Duckworth's TED Talk](#) is a great way to start the conversation about how a university, in many ways, is like a marathon — it is not just the physical shape we are in that's needed to cross the finish line, it is also what we say to ourselves to keep going (even when exhausted, hurt, and having reached our limits). What do we tell ourselves to keep going in other contexts? What strategies, attitudes, assumptions, thoughts and behaviours work for us?

### The Thriving Strategy Exercise

Christine Padesky, a Clinical Psychologist, developed a methodology to create a personal model of resilience as part of her CBT treatment for clients in therapy. You can find her [article on this resilience method here](#). We modified this intervention for TiA.

#### These are the four steps:

We are resilient when we do things we love; it just doesn't feel as effortful. So, what would happen if we intentionally applied the very things – attitudes and strategies that get us through – into a different, more difficult context?

#### Step One:

Choose an enjoyable and fulfilling activity that you love to do, currently or in the past. An activity for which you often solve problems and overcome obstacles.



## Step Two:

Identify the obstacles you face in this activity and what you do to persist. Specifically, articulate the behaviours, attitudes, assumptions, beliefs, metaphors, and feelings that help you push through.

Fill out this [chart](#) naming the activity and three obstacles you have faced, and add what you do, think and feel to persevere. You may already begin to see that these are all resilient approaches you utilize when doing something you love!

## Step Three:

Now, focus on the behaviours and attitudes that keep you going. Pull these out of the activity you love, so they become standalone approaches. Then, turn these into a [list](#) you can use in a different context.

## Step Four:

Now, by completing this [table](#), apply what keeps you going (those behaviours and attitudes) to a new context in which you are currently struggling. Test it out in context and adjust as needed.

Note: you can save and print the completed form to your computer.



## Writing Prompt: 20 Years From Now

Write without editing or attending to grammar or punctuation. Let go of your inner critic, and allow whatever comes to mind without judgment.

Today, choose one of your fantasies about what your life could be like twenty years from now. Develop a reasonable plot that would make the fantasy work out.

Play with different milestones, rites of passage, and scenarios. Whatever inspires you the most. Write for five minutes.

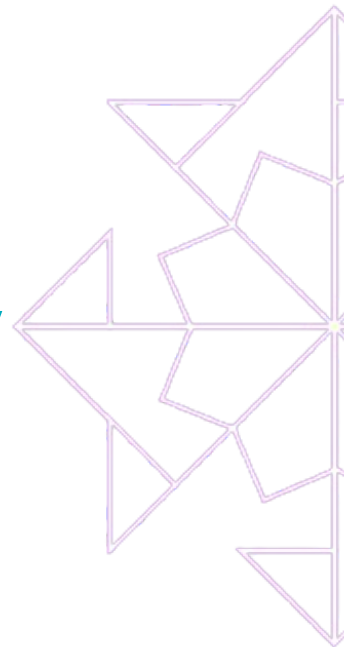


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# Learning Strategy





## Week Three- Holistic Note-taking

We discuss holistic note-taking as a three-step process where students can adjust their habits at any of the three stages: before, during, and after class to improve the quality of their notes.



### Before Class

- Alert chunking—breaking down large tasks into smaller, more manageable sub-tasks and attending to them in short, awake bursts—is the key to completing readings before class.
- Identify questions and bring them to class; listen as a ‘detective’ for the answer during the lecture and notice any impacts on your attentiveness.
- Review the course outline and look for themes, remembering your professors’ purposefulness about texts and sequencing.

### Right Before Class

- Review margin notes, underlines, and questions from readings to re-engage with the material and immerse yourself in the content.
- Call up presence, activate mindset, and bring choicefulness to listening.
- Take responsibility for distractions, practice willpower, and create new rituals.

### During Class

- Hand-write if possible; practice the necessary pause when writing by hand; consider note-taking by hand as a form of pre-studying.
- Sit at the front and away from others’ distractions.
- “What’s important?” includes overlaps, emphasis, repetition, and points of clarification.
- [View this Thriving in Action Online section for the key things we discuss about attentive note-taking.](#)

## After Class

- Review soon after, ideally within 24 hours or anytime before your next class.
- Create ongoing distilled notes, frontloading lecture and text clarification and synthesis instead of leaving it until the end of the semester.
- Connect with someone in the class to explain and soundboard, drawing upon the insights of supplemental instruction and the learning benefits of teaching others.

## Weekly

- Review by thinking, not flipping: reconnect with your notes, create links to prior readings and assignments (a recent presentation or essay), find related learning clusters, create ongoing predicting questions to identify areas of shaky understanding and enact efficient studying.

## Intentional Note-taking Methods:

- Cornell Note-taking Method
- Deena's Messy Method

The Cornell note-taking method as pictured on the next page breaks a piece of paper into three different areas. The largest area is where you capture the notes from the lecture; the margin on the right is where you can pull out key terms. The summary area at the bottom is where you can identify concepts that didn't quite make sense, create practice questions, connect content to the previous week, and so on.

As with all learning strategies in TiA, you can make this system work for you and are not limited to the exact structure presented. You could have the key terms on the left, and if you complete the pre-reading before class, you can begin to populate the key terms you come across in this section. You can also make the summary box area smaller or only have it on the page where you are wrapping up your notes for that particular class.

## STEP 1: LIVE LECTURE

This is where you practise pausing, jotting down "what's important." Make sure to use abbrev's, ditch filler words, practise self-compassion, and remember the larger aim of discernment/judgement.

## STEP 2: KEY \_\_\_\_\_

## STEP 3: SUMMARY VS. 2x2x2x2x2....

- 2 key points that stood out as critically important
- 2 tricky concepts to clarify with TA/prof
- 2 overlaps with reading from this week
- 2 overlaps with last week's class (or any other)
- 2 counterarguments
- 2 identity overlaps (where do *you* fit in/relate/or not)
- \*\*2 practice studying questions\*\*

Deena's messy method pictured on the next page adds structure by allowing you to review your in-class notes and extract the important ideas. The intention is that if you are using a notebook, the right-hand side is where you're taking in-class notes, and the left-hand side is where you're distilling what was discussed in the lecture into 5-7 key points. You can also use the bottom of the left-hand side for the same purposes as the Cornell system: practice questions, overlaps with content, clarifying questions, etc.

## STEP 2: 5-8 DISTILLED POINTS

- Look over to the live lecture “what’s important,” discerned notes; within 24-48 hours, jot down in this section the very key/salient concepts, people, formulas, applications, circuits, examples, etc.

(OPTIONAL STEP 3: 2x2x2x2x2x2x)

- \*\*2+ practice studying questions\*\*

## STEP 1- LIVE LECTURE

This is where you practise pausing, jotting down “what’s important.” Make sure to use abbrev’s, ditch filler words, practise self-compassion, and remember the larger aim of discernment/judgement.

## Notes

- Throughout this section, we discuss the importance of writing notes by hand and its impact on learning and memory (Mueller & Oppenheimer, 2014). We also highlight how writing notes by hand is connected to students’ progress moving forward, as it helps build the skill of discernment.
- If using tablets to simulate the writing process, no research currently suggests that this has any impact different from pen and paper.
- When discussing the transition to writing digitally on a tablet, we address the learning curve that will likely be associated with this change, including the choice of app and the feel of the tablet. It is essential to acknowledge that you will need time to adapt to new methods and also how to set boundaries on productive procrastination that may occur when trying out all the latest features of different apps.
- It’s usually helpful to identify one class where you want to try out new note-taking strategies.



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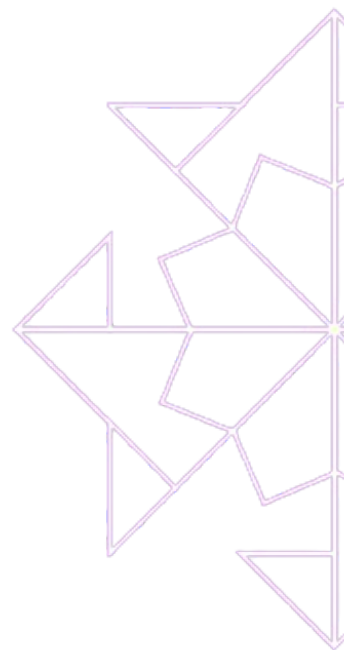
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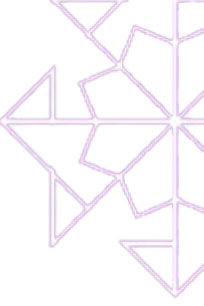
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# Week 4





Students are encouraged to widen their views this fourth week and disrupt unhelpful patterns. In this session, students learn how to flip into more positive ways of being and doing. They become equipped to enhance their optimism — their explanatory style — an essential skill to keep buoyant and forward-moving. Our writing prompt helps students attend to the fears, worries, and stresses they carry about being a student. Then, students are led through a ‘wide-awake’ reflection process to spotlight inefficient or unmotivating test-taking approaches. Students are reminded of their expertise in their own lives. They are then invited to think critically and introspectively about what they need to experience greater calm and confidence in their midterm and exam experiences.

#### **Week 4 Includes:**

- Thriving Strategies: Optimism, Hope and Active Constructive Responding.
- Writing Prompt: Being a Student.
- Learning Strategy: Calm and Confident Test-Taking.

#### **How to Teach “Broadening Perspective”**

Thriving Strategy: (1) Optimism

Martin Seligman (2006), in his book, [Learned Optimism](#), describes optimistic thinking as how we explain to ourselves why good and bad things happen to us — our explanatory style. It is about noticing how we view the world and our role in why things happen. Pessimistic thinking can interfere with productivity, resilience, and focus. Optimistic thinking leads to having more hope and energy to weather tough times: we can learn to recognize our part in good times, that we helped to make it happen, and can also regard such good times as permanent and pervasive. In this way, we can define optimism as positive expectation.

Different explanatory styles determine how resilient we may be in dealing with challenges. For example, a pessimist will blame themselves for things that go wrong, see the event as permanent, and it will negatively spill over to other areas in their life. An optimist, however, will frame that same bad event as bad luck, situation-specific, and temporary. The reverse is also striking: a pessimist will chalk good times up to luck and believe that they will be short-lived and contained, whereas an optimist will explain the same good event as something they had a hand in causing, as well as lasting and likely to influence other parts of their life positively.

Boniwell (2008) reports that when we are optimistic, we -

- Experience less distress, less anxiety, and less depression.
- Adapt better to health challenges.
- Cope and adapt to adversity.
- Deal with things head-on.
- Persevere in goal-directed activities.
- Engage in health-promoting behaviours.
- Are more productive at work/school.

Lee (2019) found that optimists between ages 40 and 90 tended to live up to 15% longer and had greater odds of achieving “exceptional longevity” (age 85 or older). They found this to be true even when considering socioeconomic status, health conditions, depression, social integration, and health behaviours (e.g., smoking, diet, and alcohol use).

Here is an example of these two styles of explaining a final exam grade:

### Receiving a good grade on the exam

#### An optimist might say

1. “I am a good student.”
2. “I have learned how to get organized and study efficiently for exams.”
3. “I’m on a roll and will do well in this course and my studies generally.”

#### A pessimist might say

1. “I did OK on this exam, but it was a fluke.”
2. “The professor took pity on the class and graded on a curve.”
3. “I’ll never manage to pull this off again.”

### Receiving a failing grade on an exam

#### An optimist might say

1. “I was feeling sick that day and genuinely struggled to focus.”
2. “It was an unusually tough exam.”
3. “I know my stuff and will make up this bad grade in my other courses.”

#### A pessimist might say

1. “I don’t understand this material. I’m an idiot.”
2. “I will never succeed in this program.”
3. “I’m not smart enough to get by at university.”



## Discussion:

Ask your students to provide examples of optimism and pessimism in their own lives.

## Exercises:

A. Flip from a pessimistic to an optimistic explanatory style: These six questions can help facilitate this switch, regardless of whether the event was positive or negative. By posing these questions to ourselves and answering them, we begin to see things like an optimist would.

Ask yourself when something good happens:

1. What role did I play in making this happen?
2. How can I make this permanent?
3. What can I do to have this spill over into other aspects of my life?

Ask yourself when something bad happens:

1. How is this also the responsibility of others or circumstances beyond my control?
2. How can I keep this temporary?
3. What must I do to contain this event's damage or long-term effects?

B. A poem to inspire hope:

The word 'hope' the learned say is derived from the word 'hop' and leads one on to leap.  
Plato, in his turn, says that the leaping of young creatures is the essence of play —  
So be it! To hope, then, means to take a playful leap into the future—  
to dare to spring from firm ground- to play trustingly—  
invest energy, laughter;  
And one good leap encourages another—  
On then with the dance.

Attributed to Joan M. Erikson, Oct 1993.

C. Watch and discuss this [animated film about two brothers](#) (one an optimist and the other a pessimist). Their father decides to see if he can change their explanatory style through different kinds of gifts.

## Thriving Strategy (2) Hope

Dr. Shane Lopez (2013), a prominent researcher on this topic, says in an interview through UMNCSH on a YouTube [video](#) that "...hope is based on the belief that the future will be better than the present, coupled with the belief that you have the power to make it so." (0:24-0:50). He also tells us that we tend to feel hope if we are clear about our desires, have different pathways, and actively engage in making it happen. Hope is a choice; we can learn to do it over time.

Hope is contagious—when we spend time with hopeful people, two things happen simultaneously: we learn how they put hope into action, and they inspire us to feel hopeful.

Gallagher et al. (2017), in their article, Hope and the Academic Trajectory of College Students, state that "...hope is the psychological variable that has the most robust relationship with academic performance and timely graduation." (pg. 350). They found that higher levels of hope predicted a higher GPA (by one letter grade) and the likelihood that the student will continue their education, returning each term until graduation. They explored the question: Why is hope good for us? And found that -

- It leads to increased happiness, productivity & well-being.
- Hopeful students are 12% more productive at university.
- Hopeful workers are 14% more productive at work.

### Create a Hope Map

1. Clarify your goal(s) for a year from now.
2. Think of three different plans you could try to reach the goal.
3. Before you start implementing any of these plans, identify the obstacles that could stand in your way and brainstorm new plans that will address these obstacles.

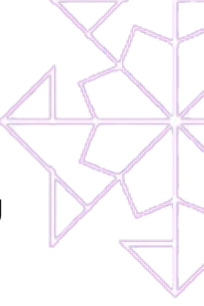
Pathways	Obstacles	Goals
Plan A	Structural Hurdles (Access, Finances) or Lack of Opportunities Information Strategies Connections Energy Motivation Determination Support	Your goal 12 months from now
Plan B		
Plan C		

## What is Active Constructive Responding (ACR)?

First identified by Shelly Gable (2006), she initially researched romantic partnerships and discovered that how we respond to good news (in the context of our relationships) is a better predictor of long-term relationship success than how we react to bad news. This research has been generalized to other relationships, including classmates, colleagues in a work setting, family relationships and friends.

Gable (2006) identified four types of responses we might have to the good news shared by others.

1. Active Destructive
2. Passive Destructive
3. Passive Constructive
4. Active Constructive



Active Constructive Responding is the communication style that leads to the most fulfilling relationships. The other three are, to varying degrees, detractors of good relationships.

**The Hallmarks of ACR are:**

- Authentic interest, curiosity & asking questions.
- Pride in other person's accomplishments & celebratory.
- Indicating joy through non-verbals (eye contact, body language, tone of voice).
- Presentness & single-mindedness.

**Practice ACR in pairs:**

- Tell your partner good news that you've received recently.
- Respond with an ACR approach.
- Switch partners.

Together, explore how ACR makes you both feel. Use this [video on ACR](#) to help you explore.



**Writing Prompt:**

Have you ever been told by someone dear to you that you're just not listening to them? What would it mean to you if you could "listen with the ears of the heart?" Read the quote below and respond to it in any way you choose.

"I speak because I know my needs,  
I speak with hesitation because I know not yours.  
My words come from my life's experiences  
Your understanding comes from yours.  
Because of this, what I say,  
And what you hear,  
may not be the same.  
So, if you will listen carefully,  
Not only with your ears,  
But with your eyes and with your heart,  
Maybe somehow we can communicate".

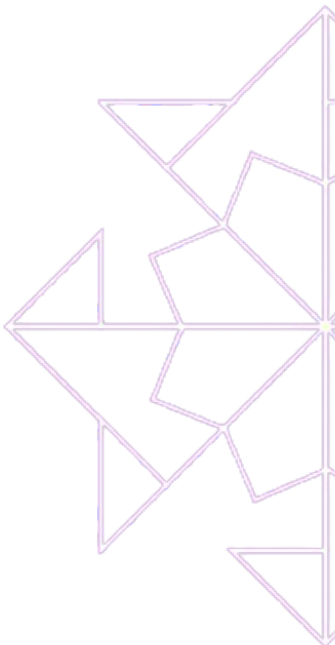
This poem is part of a more extensive essay on active listening. If you want to learn more about how to listen fully and how it can build a relationship – [check out the extensive essay of Listening with Your Heart As Well as Your Ears](#). University of Nebraska.

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# Learning Strategy



## Week Four- Calm & Confident Test Taking

When exploring calm and confident test-taking, we begin our session by inviting students to be open about reframing their experience and perspective around test-taking. We then shift to creating a sharing space where students can share their experiences with tests.

Specifically, we ask them to think about what it feels like in their body when walking toward the class to take the test or exam. Usually, students will discuss anxiety and stress and how it manifests for them, such as shallow breathing, racing thoughts, blanking out, etc. We then shift to creating an intention around what the students want their next test experience to feel like and the strategies to support them in making this shift.

To begin reframing the test-taking experience, we discuss how it can be helpful for students to bookend their experience. We present this strategy as “**deliberate before and after.**” We ask students to reflect on things that help them shift their energy. This could be music, family or friends, a book, a comedy special, a TV show—anything they can easily integrate into their lives deliberately before they need to write a test or exam. Adding something deliberately afterward also helps them shift their energy and decompress. It could be similar to what they did before the test or something completely different. It's nice to create a sharing space here for students to discuss what these experiences or things might be for them. We emphasize that students should prioritize doing something after regardless of how they felt they performed on the test or exam. This is because, more often than not, when students feel they have performed well, they will celebrate or do something that lifts their spirits. But if they feel they didn't perform well, they could be inclined to push through and study harder. To reframe and have students approach tests and exams easily and confidently, we emphasize that spaciousness and positive energy shifts are always available to them, which also helps with their stamina.





## Stamina

- We discuss stamina in the context of studying in the weeks and days before the tests or exams and how students can use their study breaks to recharge to return to the content refreshed rather than depleted. One strategy we discuss is taking at least 50% of their break time away from screens, stretching, being present in their bodies, drinking water, and, if possible, being present in nature.
- Strategies to maintain stamina during a 50-minute, two-hour, or three-hour exam include reading through the entire exam before beginning to answer any questions. This helps students be aware of the grading scheme, identify how they can allocate their time, and alleviate unpredictability, which can ease anxiety. They could begin by answering the easy questions to build their confidence. You can choose to add more tools by reviewing **our website Thriving in Action Online**.
- We point out that some of their confidence and ease will come from actually understanding the content, and the other portion will come from how they managed their energy leading up to the exam and their sleep and nourishment.
- For students who have not taken formal tests before, we discuss simulating the test-taking environment and time. Finding practice tests and questions and answering them within the allocated time can help them build their understanding and confidence in allocating their time. We emphasize connecting with professors and teaching assistants (TAs) for more resources if needed.
- For online tests and exams, we discuss that students should have notifications turned off on their devices to mitigate distractions and be mindful of their environment. If there are things that will cause them to be distracted, they should be mindful to remove them. We also discuss being prepared if anything happens to their internet connection, ensuring that they know how to take screenshots if there are glitches so they can provide them to their professor or TA.



# Handout

## Bolstering The Before's

What will you intentionally do the morning before a test/exam?

What will you intentionally do the afternoon before?

What will you intentionally do the night before?

## Arranging The Afters

What will you do right after the test/exam to decompress and shift energy?

What will you do that evening or the following morning (even if there is another test or exam) to savour and celebrate?

## Focus On Flow

**Stamina, engagement, and perseverance are as crucial as content knowledge.** What will you do before and during the test or exam to fight fatigue, boredom, or frustration?

## References

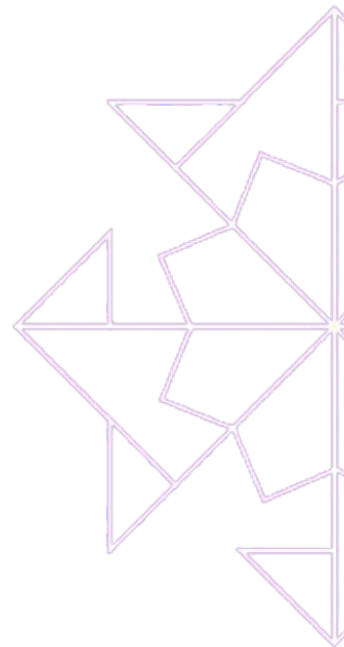
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# Week 5





In week five, Gratitude is perceived as an academic and well-being skill. Savouring, in the moment, is taught as a practice and approach. We accompany this with a ‘decluttering’ writing prompt that asks students to perceive, plunge into, and then shed all that they are feeling in that very moment. Following this, students are invited to consider their present level of focus and concentration, and are provided with tools and techniques to strengthen these cognitive capacities.

### **Week 5 Includes:**

- Thriving Strategy: Gratitude & Savouring
- Writing Prompt: Right Now
- Learning Strategy: Focus and Concentration


### **Thriving Strategy: Gratitude & Savouring**

Gratitude is far more than simply saying thank you when someone does something kind in the moment. It is about adopting a grateful emotional state of being whereby we feel blessed and worthy of something extraordinary that happened.

Adapting to any new environment involves paying close attention to and assessing your strengths and weaknesses. Noticing opportunities and possibilities and appreciating good things can boost your well-being and happiness. Gratitude strengthens the bonds of friendship and connections to classmates, roommates, instructors, teaching assistants, and staff and helps you to cope with stress. Gratitude also increases the intensity and pleasure associated with savouring positive experiences.

As human beings, we have a fantastic capacity to adapt to tough times. We find a way to work around them, adapt, and, to some extent, accept things as they are. Unfortunately, we also adapt to the good times in our lives. Something or someone that we once considered exciting and unique eventually becomes something that we take for granted. One of the best ways to overcome this ‘hedonic adaptation’ is to intentionally notice the good things in our lives, acknowledge their importance, and savour the experience.

‘Three Good Things’ is a simple exercise where students note three moments for which they are grateful. This is sister to the ‘What Went Well?’ exercise we do at the beginning of each Thriving in Action session.



Focusing on small, positive everyday events helps us realize a sense of Gratitude. Here are four aspects that are each connected to the concept of Gratitude. Consider the definitions provided here for each:

- Thankful – feeling pleased and relieved.
- Grateful – involves the act of showing appreciation or kindness.
- Gratitude – occurs when we feel thankful for something or someone.
- Appreciation – is when a person can notice the good in something or someone else.

Robert Emmons (2020), a professor of psychology at the University of California, Davis, defined two key aspects of Gratitude:

- Affirmation – noticing the good and saying yes to life
- Recognition – that the source of good is outside of you.

Regarding recognition, Emmons said in the Making Positive Psychology Work podcast: “This doesn’t mean denying that pain, suffering, or bad things exist, but it’s about focusing on the good. It expands by recognizing that the source of this good is outside of you. Often, the good comes from other people, but it could be any source outside of yourself, such as a spiritual being or power, the universe, or even from your pets. It’s acknowledging that you have been given gifts, big and small, to help you achieve the goodness in your lives.” (2:30 - 4:27)

A pivotal study by Seligman et al. (2005) found that writing three good things down every day along with “how you contributed to that good thing happening” significantly increased happiness and decreased depressive symptoms immediately after the intervention, and these effects lasted as long as six months post-intervention.

Who participated?

Five hundred seventy-seven participants volunteered to participate in an internet study: 58% were female, 42% were male, and 62% of subjects were between the ages of 35 and 64. There were no financial incentives to participate in the research study initially. Still, there was one chance of winning a \$500 lottery and three chances of winning a \$100 award if they completed the six months post-tests.

How was the research study set up?



There were six different conditions/exercises:

- Placebo control.
- Gratitude visit.
- Three good things exercise.
- You at your best.
- Using your signature strengths in a new way.
- Identifying your signature strengths.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of the six conditions and asked to do one of these exercises for one week. They did a pretest and were tested at the end of the first week, one month later, three months later and six months later.

What did they find?

The Three Good Things exercise and Using your Signature Strengths in a New Way both increased happiness scores and decreased depression scores for the entire six months after engaging in the exercise.

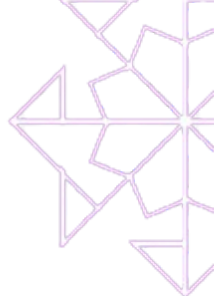
The Gratitude Visit exercise caused significant positive changes for one month after doing the exercise. This exercise had the largest impact initially, but it didn't last past the one-month mark. Happiness and depression scores returned to baseline by the end of the six-month post-tests.

What have other researchers found?

Emmons & McCullough (2004) conducted a study in which they investigated correlations between people who scored high on Gratitude and found that those participants experienced more satisfaction with life, more prosocial & other centred behaviour, and less maladaptive self-preoccupation, better sleep and vitality, and more optimism.

What else is interesting about the research on Gratitude?

Allen (2018) states that Gratitude has been so richly researched that there are three waves of gratitude research. Each wave focused on different aspects of Gratitude:



**Wave 1:** Gratitude, linked to happiness and stress reduction, can reduce depression and increase positive awareness.

**Wave 2:** Physical health outcomes (including exercise and self-care) found that Gratitude is, in fact, good medicine.

**Wave 3:** Neuroscience of Gratitude found that Gratitude tends to activate your brain across different networks, including those relating to pleasure, rewards, and social perspective-taking.

## Thriving Strategy:

### 1. How Can You Increase Your Capacity For Gratitude?

These strategies are very effective in increasing a sense of well-being and counteracting negativity bias and hedonic adaptation.

1. The first is called the [Three Good Things exercise](#). Try doing this every day for a week and monitor the impact on your mood and well-being.
2. The second exercise is called the [gratitude letter](#). But first, watch this 7-minute – [Gratitude letter video experiment](#) to learn more about how this letter can impact your well-being.

What about Awe?

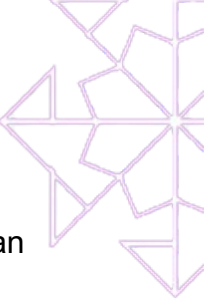
Keltner (2019), in the podcast episode [The Science of Awe – On Wisdom #20](#), stated, “Awe is a positive state which makes us feel curious and wonder about the world... things that transcend the present moment and our current frame of reference.”

Two Key Aspects of Awe:

Keltner and Haidt (2003) describe two critical facets of Awe:

1. Perceived **vastness** (larger than the self, or power, outside of our standard frame of reference).
2. Need for **accommodation** (when we can't make sense of our experience – we need to shift our understanding somehow and make room for something new)—referring to Piaget's description of adjusting our understanding to assimilate new information. The need to assimilate new information can produce fear or new insights.





Note: both vastness and accommodation are needed to describe Awe. For example – surprise involves accommodation but not vastness, whereas deferring to a great power can involve vastness, but there is no need to accommodate.

Rudd et al. (2012) define Awe as:

- More vast, immense, or complex than our day-to-day experiences.
- Difficult to hold or understand easily, so we need to make space for it and adjust.
- Disrupting the usual flow of time and other constraints.
- Bringing out curiosity & creativity.
- Increasing our openness to learning.
- Enhancing our willingness to participate.

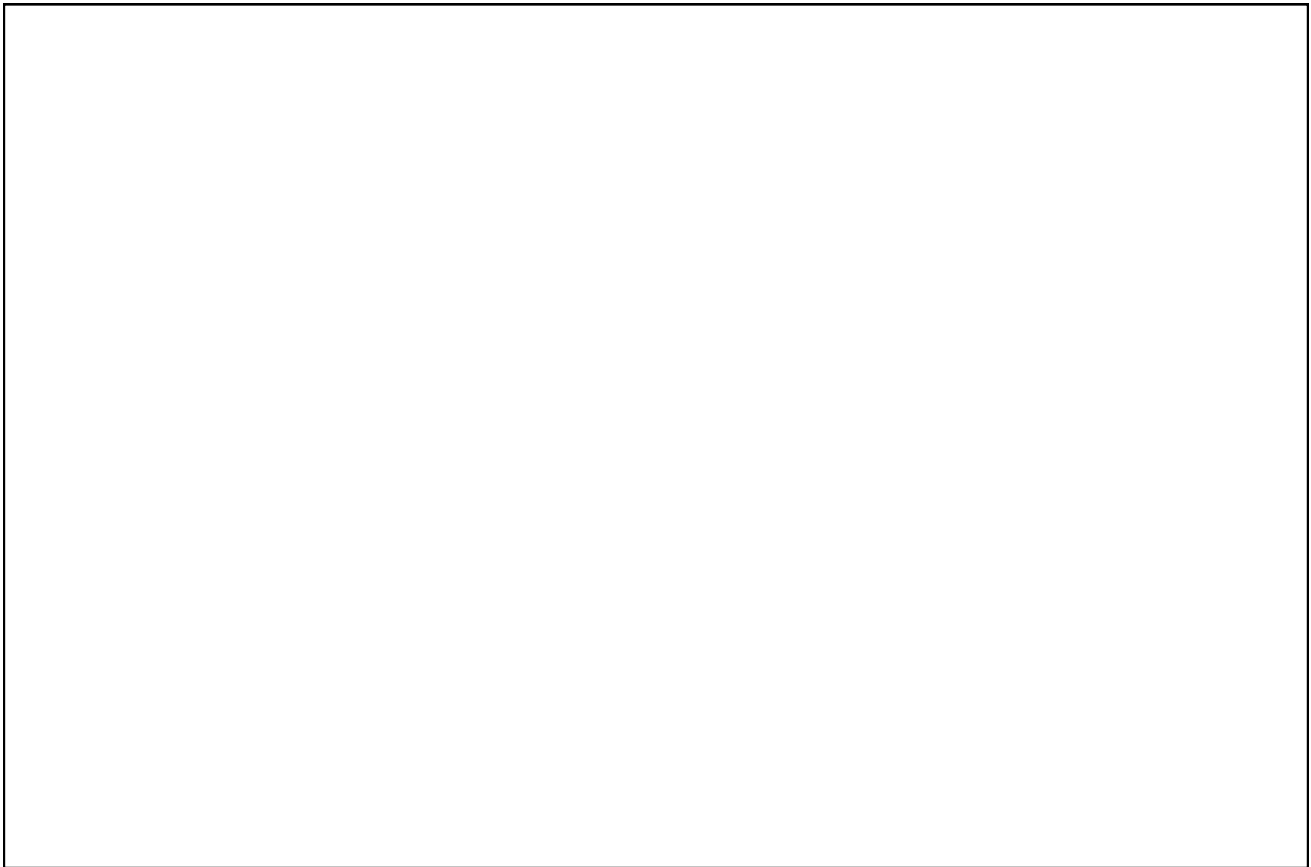
They also assert that Awe has a wide range of positive impacts on our well-being. Specifically, Awe

- Improves mood and lowers stress.
- Elevates physical health in the short- and long-term.
- Hones critical thinking skills.
- Opens our perspective.
- Fosters humility.
- Expands our sense of time.
- Unites us, making us feel more connected with one another.
- Increases life satisfaction & well-being.



## Writing Prompt:

What's your favourite song? What do you love about it? What gets you or guts you about the song? What are you grateful for about that song? Think about lyrics, melodies, harmonies, instrumentation, or memories and emotions evoked.

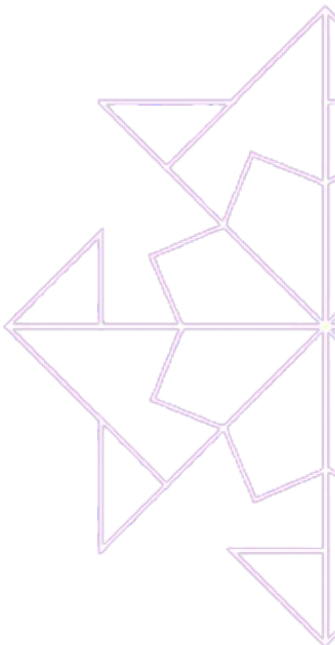


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# Learning Strategy



## Week Five- Focus and Concentration

We integrate strategies related to strengthening focus and concentration throughout the TiA series. This is an overview of strategies you can adjust, adapt, and share throughout the semester.

**Uni-Tasking:** Focusing on one thing at a time. Bringing intention and care to work on one academic task for a while before switching to another. The invitation here is to start where students are; if they feel they can only focus for five minutes at a time, that's where they should start. The aim is to shift away from multitasking and having multiple tabs open on the screen with different notifications going off while answering text messages at the same time. Learning what it feels like to work on one thing with intention helps build the muscle of focus and concentration.

**Nature Immersion:** We discuss attention restoration theory (Kaplan, 1995) and how being present in nature can have a ripple effect on focus, concentration, and memory, and much more! At Toronto Metropolitan University, we run a monthly Mood Routes program to help students find urban green spaces in downtown Toronto while connecting with others.

**Tuning into Basic Rest-Activity Cycle (BRAC):** We discuss the natural rhythms of the body that last about 90 minutes and reset. We are alert during the first 60 minutes, and in the last 20-30 minutes, we are in a dreamier state. It is helpful for students to tune into their cycle and learn when they're feeling more energized versus dreamy and how they align their academic tasks accordingly. The dreamy state can be super helpful to tap into creativity and brainstorming for different projects, essays, and so forth.

**Unplugging:** Devices constantly fragment attention and focus with constant stimuli. It can be helpful for students to think about how they can take some time away from screens. For example, when taking breaks while studying, spending 50% of their break time away from screens and noticing its impact.

**Exercise:** We discuss the ripple effect of active well-being on cognition. Highlighting that active well-being can look different for different people, the invitation here, is experimenting with different types of exercises and noticing the impact it has on their energy and focus.

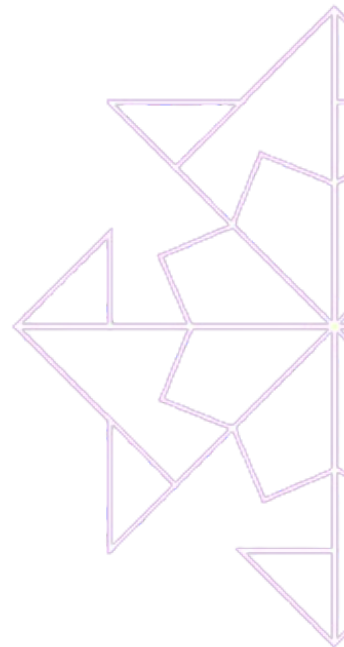


## Resources:

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# Week 6



This week, students are taught about Flow; they are encouraged to find, remember, or reinvigorate activities that provide deep engagement, absorption, ease, and timelessness. After a writing prompt which asks students to craft an ideal day and a conversation about how such an exercise can improve mood and outlook, we explore several entry points into academic writing in the hopes of mending unproductive or unpleasant prior experiences with writing; students are equipped with how to progress through writer's block and procrastination.

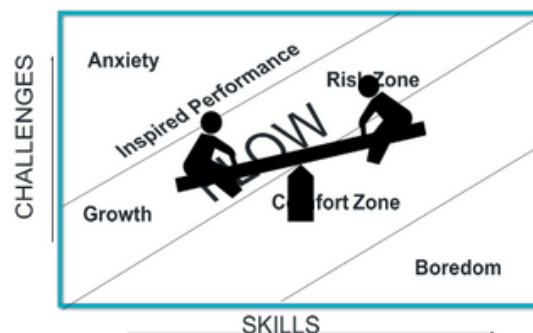
Week 6 Includes:

- Thriving Strategy: Flow
- Writing Prompt: A Perfect Day
- Learning Strategy: Waypoints into Essay-Writing

## Thriving Strategy: Flow

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (pronounced – chick-sent-me-high) is the psychologist who introduced and researched the concept of Flow and optimal performance. He was also part of the group of psychologists who founded the field of positive psychology along with Seligman and others. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) describes Flow as “a state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience is so enjoyable that people will continue to do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it” (p. 4).

Flow is considered the midpoint between anxiety and boredom. In this chart, with challenges on the y-axis and skills on the x-axis, you can see that when your skills are too high, you get bored, and when challenges are too high, you feel anxious. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) uses this dynamic to suggest a pathway into Flow: “If challenges are too low, one gets back to flow by increasing them. If challenges are too great, one can return to the flow state by learning new skills” (p. 5).





## What are the conditions of Flow?

In other words, what did Csikszentmihalyi discover about the conditions that support the likelihood that a person could get into Flow? He found that these are the external conditions that support Flow:

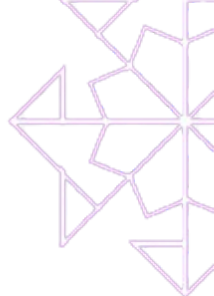
- There are clear & attainable goals for the task or project.
- Your skills meet the challenge at hand.
- There are constraints involved in the activity (like rules or deadlines).
- Timely feedback keeps you on track.
- You have personal control over the situation and the outcome.

## Where do we experience Flow?

- Creative activities (art, writing, photography).
- Team sports (basketball, hockey, tennis).
- Games (chess, poker, bridge).
- Work (when the challenge is exciting).
- Learning (new skills, concepts, processes and procedures).
- Playing a musical instrument (piano, cello, guitar).
- Gardening, cooking, painting, carpentry...
- Long-distance running, mountain climbing

Flow experiences are linked to intrinsic motivation, which fuels a positive feedback loop. Doing something for its own sake and for your reasons leads to increased performance and positive experiences, which motivate you to do more. This is a crucial characteristic of Flow. What happens to us while we're in Flow? We experience -

- Intense concentration.
- Diminished self-consciousness.
- Lack of awareness of our physical needs.
- Distorted sense of time.
- Deep fulfillment from engaging in an activity for its own sake.
- Doing our personal best.
- Deep joy.



In this [video](#) (2019), Steven Kotler, Executive Director of the Flow Research Collective, describes how to get into a Flow state. He explains, among other things, a fascinating explanation for why our subjective sense of time changes while in the Flow state.

Note – you can find the video section where Kotler describes what happens in the brain when we experience a distorted sense of time (at the timestamp 10:54–18:00).

Kotler called it Transient Hypo-Frontality. When we are in a Flow state, our prefrontal cortex goes offline. The prefrontal cortex is the area of the brain that tracks our sense of time (in addition to being the part of the brain that engages in executive functioning and planning). When we are in Flow, we can no longer monitor time in a conventional sense. Instead, it will seem to either pass very quickly or stand still.

Kotler explains that what is happening is an energy exchange – the brain temporarily shuts down non-essential parts to provide more energy for attention and creativity. Our changed awareness of time is called the “deep now.” And in this state, stress and anxiety drop away as we engage fully in the task at hand. But, simultaneously, our sense of self falls away, and we become one with the activity we are doing.

### **What are the long-term benefits of Flow?**

- Greater enjoyment and fulfilment.
- Increased engagement.
- Greater happiness.
- Greater intrinsic motivation (internal rewards for the love of it).
- More creativity.
- Better emotional regulation.
- Improved performance.
- Lifelong learning inspired by the joy of engagement.

Diane Allen poses these three questions in her [TED talk](#),

- Where and when am I most in the Flow state?
- What am I doing – on the outside – and the inside?
- And why is it so meaningful?

Or, put in another way: “How do I shift into the Flow state on purpose and with purpose?” or “What is my Flow strategy?” Consider how you might begin answering these questions for yourself.



## General principles that can help you create space for Flow:

- Choose work/studies you love.
- Ensure it's challenging but not too hard.
- Find your quiet, peak time.
- Clear away distractions.
- Learn to focus on that task for as long as possible.
- Enjoy yourself.
- Reap the rewards.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990) described how he collected his data, which informed his conclusions about Flow. He used something called an Experience Sampling Method. Subjects were asked to respond to a beeper at random intervals during the day and night and were asked questions about what they were doing and how engaged they felt.

## Here is a sample of the questions they were asked to answer:

- What were you thinking about?
- Where were you?
- What was the main thing you were doing?
- Why were you doing this particular activity?
- How well were you concentrating?
- How self-conscious were you?
- Did you feel good about yourself?
- Were you in control of the situation?
- Describe your mood.
- Challenges of the activity.
- Your skills in the activity.

In one of many studies conducted by Csikszentmihalyi and his team, they asked: Do people experience Flow more often at work or during leisure activities?

They found that when engaged at work and in active leisure activities, subjects reported being in Flow far more often than when engaged in passive leisure activities. Active leisure activities include skill-based hobbies such as making music, playing games of skill, and learning a new language. In contrast, passive leisure activities include watching TV or a streaming service, reading, and visiting a restaurant with friends. Csikszentmihalyi concluded that active leisure activities require skills and can be challenging, just like work, while we need passive leisure activities for relaxation; they don't lead to Flow.

## Flow Exercise:

Interview someone who frequently experiences Flow. Perhaps a writer, a researcher, someone who knits or cooks or gardens, an athlete, a musician, or a teacher. Anyone who is deeply engaged in their lives.

One of the best ways to learn about Flow is to tap into the wisdom and experience of others who have found their way into Flow. What are they doing? What is their secret? Is there something in their insight that you can borrow and try?

What was it like to be in the presence of someone who lives in Flow? What did you learn? What are your most memorable takeaways?

Re-craft your work environment to find Flow - exercise.

Lindsey (2018) states, “87% of people worldwide report not being engaged at work.” What can you do to increase your level of engagement and find Flow? How can you redesign your work environment?

Start by posing these questions to yourself:


- What are my strengths?
- How can I tailor my effort to leverage these strengths?
- How can I form more meaningful connections with colleagues?
- What can I gain or learn from this new challenge?

Then, think about how you can take some control and redesign one of these three components of your work, which will be the starting point for your experience.

- Your relationships
- Your tasks
- Your thoughts

Add the following component when you are confident that you are progressing on the first. For example, start working on relationships with co-workers and your manager. Can you infuse the relationship with more respect, fun or curiosity?

Once the atmosphere at work improves, can you try experimenting with a new approach to the core tasks you need to perform? Perhaps you can make a tedious routine task more exciting or challenging by adding the goal of getting it done as well as possible in the shortest amount of time, for example.



Once your work environment is friendlier and more respectful, and you intentionally engage more deeply in the tasks, consider how this might influence your attitude towards work.

Are you enjoying it more? Can you see the potential for advancement? Can you find the meaning or purpose that seemed missing before?

The redesign process is one portal to becoming more engaged at work. When engagement is the norm, finding Flow is much more likely.

### **Strategies to enter and stay in Flow:**

1. Be wholeheartedly open to new and different experiences, bringing an attitude of willingness to learn.
2. Look for high-challenge, high-skill situations, and take on new challenges as you become comfortable with the old ones.
3. Avoid allowing your concentration to be pulled away by unrelated concerns.
4. Have clear rules for performance.
5. Ask for feedback.
6. Do things that allow for some control over your work (studying for exams and preparing assignments and presentations).

### **Reaching your optimal performance:**

- When you feel bored in class, try and seek out new challenges within the context of the course or through an extracurricular related to the topic
- If you're feeling anxious about your performance, try tutoring, joining or creating a study group, meeting with your instructor during their office hours, or practicing a growth mindset, prioritizing the learning process.

Understanding Flow: Investigate the above Flow diagram (**p #87**). What kinds of situations have led to flow in your life? How does it feel to be so engaged in something that time seems to pass differently?



## Exercises to Increase Flow:

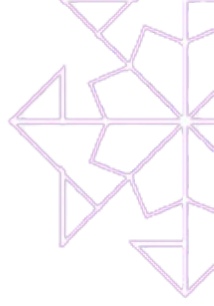
1. When in conversation, listen carefully and ask many follow-up questions, such as, “And then what happened?” and “Why did you think that?” This approach will engage you more fully. Make it a goal to learn more about the speaker as you are having this conversation.
2. Choose leisure activities that invite you to concentrate and challenge your mind or deeply engage your skills. Often, these activities have clear goals and rules to guide you with timely feedback to indicate how well you are doing (sports, games, playing a musical instrument, artistic activities, etc.).
3. Think about your studies as leading to your future. When we see our work as a ‘calling,’ we take on extra challenges to fully engage and live in Flow much more of the time.



## Writing Prompt: A Perfect Day

Without editing, without attending to grammar or punctuation, write. Let go of your inner critic and write whatever comes to mind without judgment.

Imagine a perfect day. You are not restricted by time, money, or your geographical location. You can be anywhere. Where are you? What are you doing, and what are you not doing? What is around you? What do you see, hear, smell, feel? Who are you with or without?



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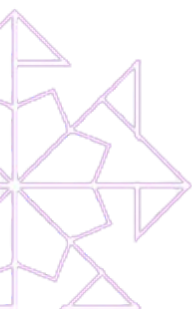
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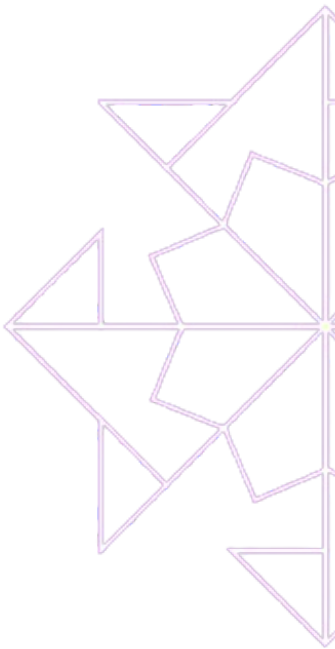
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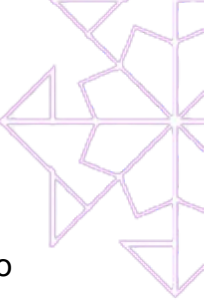
# Learning Strategy



## Week Six: Waypoints into Essay-Writing

We discuss strategies for essay writing, specifically related to getting started on the essay and working through writer's block, as these are the most common issues students encounter.

- We begin by exploring how to decrease friction when getting started. We revisit the topic of assignment planner tools from the Top Five Learning Strategies Tips section and run through an example of how to break an essay down into smaller chunks using one of these tools. Once we break the essay into smaller pieces, we highlight the first step, always 'understanding the assignment.'
- To further facilitate getting started, we re-introduce the Student Papers and Academic Research Kit (SPARK) resource created by learning specialists at York University. We emphasize the [“Understanding your Assignment Checklist”](#) and explain that this is a simple way to extract important information about their assignment from the syllabus/course outline and create space to ask clarifying questions. When working on tight deadlines, it can be easy for students to skip this step, but we discuss how taking these 20 minutes could save them points on their essay by ensuring they know what citation format is expected, word count, number of resources required, etc. The [SPARK toolkit](#) also explains standard terms for students unfamiliar with written assignments, such as compare/contrast, trace, analyze, etc.
- Students seeking to understand academic terms better can use the tool [rewordify.com](#), which simplifies difficult terms.
- Once students have grasped the foundation of understanding their assignment, we discuss strategies for initiating the actual writing process. These strategies can be applied when beginning or working through writer's block.
- **Start with a free-write:** Throughout TiA, students complete writing prompts, essentially engaging in free writes. We emphasize that students can utilize this practice when approaching essay writing. They can initiate a free-writing session by putting pen to paper or typing about their feelings regarding the content. Alternatively, they could select a quote from their reading and respond to it to generate momentum.
- **Start with speaking:** Sometimes, facing a blank page or digital document can be daunting. Even when students have ideas, they may struggle with organizing them. In these instances, when students need to clear their minds, we suggest they begin by speaking. Describing their thoughts and ideas before writing can help create space to identify key points on which to focus.



Editing: If students are seeking to enhance the quality of their writing, we emphasize the importance of editing. Students are instructed to print out their final draft (ensuring it's double-spaced) and to take a few days away from the essay, if possible. Upon returning to the essay, they should read it aloud and make edits, inputting them within 24 hours.

If students prefer not to print, it would be best to read aloud from the screen or have a screen reader read the paper to catch any errors.

**A note on citations and research:**

- Students must understand the citation format to be used.
- Integrating academic research into papers is a skill that is refined over time. Students should strive to integrate academic research rather than inserting it into a paragraph with little flow or transition.

**A note on resources:**

- We always highlight the resources available at the university that can be helpful for students, such as the Writing Centre and librarians who can assist with research, among others.

[To explore other strategies related to essay writing, visit Thriving in Action Online](#)

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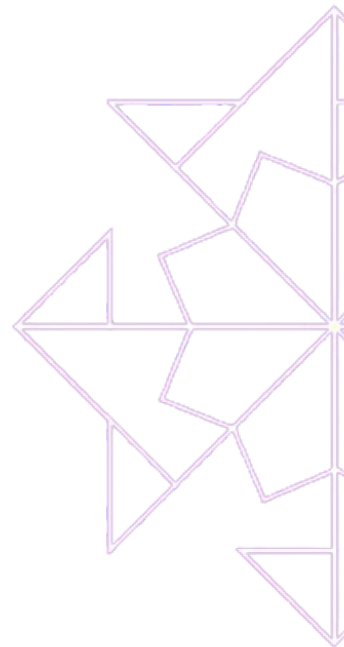
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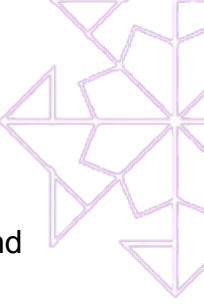
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# Week 7





In week 7, we make our underlying pedagogy of cultivating a growth mindset throughout Thriving in Action explicit. Carol Dweck (2007), a psychologist from Stanford University and a world-renowned researcher in personality, social psychology, and developmental psychology, wrote [Mindset: The New Psychology of Success](#). In it, she develops the concept that hard work and dedication are what we all need to succeed. Our attitudes towards effort and willingness to learn from mistakes can be game changers.

Dweck distinguishes between a growth mindset and a fixed mindset. She suggests that talent, intelligence, and aptitude are the beginning points, but our belief that effort will get us there leads to success in our endeavours. Welcoming effort as the key strategy on the road to success is what characterizes a growth mindset. Mistakes and setbacks can lead us to a new direction or solution when perceived as information.

Week 7 Includes:

- Thriving Strategy: Growth Mindset
- Writing Prompt: Best Mistakes - Describe the best mistake you ever made
- Learning Strategy: Awakening Awe & Collaborative Group Work

How did Dweck identify these two mindsets?

Watch this 10-minute [TED talk](#), Dweck, C. (2014) The Power of Believing that you can Improve, to learn more about it. One way to think about these two mindsets is to answer this question (posed by Dweck in her book Mindset): "When do you feel smart? When are you flawless or when are you learning?" (p. 24). Dweck reports that people with a fixed mindset answered, "It's when I don't make any mistakes" and "When I finish something fast, and it's perfect." And "When something is easy for me, but other people can't do it." People with a growth mindset answered the same question with the following responses: "When it's really hard, and I try really hard, and I can do something I couldn't do before." Or, "[When] I work on something for a long time, and I start to figure it out" (p.24).

A growth mindset is a set of beliefs that determine our behaviour, outlook, and attitude. This attitude towards learning and the need for hard work is essential in achieving our goals.

## Reflection question to pose to our students:

Do you believe that your intelligence and talent are the only things that will lead to your success? Do you think that you're not smart if you have to work hard at something? Do you tend to give up early on in the process if you reach a roadblock, saying to yourself, "Some people have this ability, and some people don't, and I don't?" You might operate from a fixed mindset if these ring true for you.

Sometimes, cartoons capture concepts better than anything else. For example, a Calvin and Hobbes cartoon reveals the false dichotomy between a Growth Mindset and a Fixed Mindset. It's all about our attitude toward effort. In this [Calvin and Hobbes cartoon](#), Calvin asks Susie what she is doing. (She is working hard at her schoolwork, with her books and papers all around her). She explained that she didn't understand the material in her textbook, so she re-read it, reviewed her notes from class, and was now writing her summary. Calvin asks her why she is working so hard, and she answers that it was worth it because she understands the material now. Calvin responded, "Huh, I used to think you were smart."

With a Fixed Mindset, which Calvin seems to have, you believe you can either do something or put in the effort. And effort is necessary for those who don't have the ability. In a growth mindset, you believe (as Susie does) that everyone needs to work hard and put in the effort to succeed.

Do we have the same mindset for everything we do?

The simple answer is no; we often have a growth mindset about some areas of our lives and a fixed mindset about others. For example, you might find that learning a new language comes easily to you, and you approach it with curiosity and a growth mindset while learning chemistry or statistics, which might trigger a fixed mindset.

It is also true that at different stages of our lives, we may move from a fixed to a growth mindset or the opposite if we are triggered somehow. However, we can also cultivate a growth mindset at any stage of life.

What Cultivates a Growth Mindset?

- Process Praise for effort, strategies, focus, and perseverance.
- Remembering "not yet..."
- Accepting that effort and deliberate practice lead to rewiring the brain to become smarter.
- Mistakes are an essential part of the learning process.



What is the difference between Person Praise and Process Praise?

In Person Praise, we focus on the finished product or accomplishment and do not admit or inquire about what it took to get there. We might say things like -

- You are so smart.
- You are so talented.
- You are the best, the fastest, or the most creative.

While in Process Praise, we acknowledge that we are all works in progress and effort is essential to success, and say things like -

- You studied hard.
- You tested yourself on the material.
- You tried all kinds of strategies until you got it.
- You stuck to it and got it done.
- You took on a challenging project – it will take hard work, and you will learn a lot.

Person Praise cultivates a fixed mindset, while Process Praise cultivates a growth mindset. If parents and teachers had used Process Praise when we were children, it would have supported our growth mindset. But cultivating a growth mindset is never too late if others didn't do so when we were children. We can praise ourselves now, instead. And it still works.


How can we change our beliefs about ourselves? What role does neuroplasticity play in this change?

[The video on Neuroplasticity](#) (2012) by Sentis defines neuroplasticity and how the brain creates new neural pathways, which lead to attitude and behaviour changes.

How does a self-fulfilling prophecy apply to mindset?

Let's start by defining a self-fulfilling prophecy: Merton (1948) suggests that it is a "... prediction that directly or indirectly causes itself to become true, by the very terms of the prophecy itself, due to positive feedback between belief and behaviour" (p.193).





Self-fulfilling prophecies function like a never-ending cycle, with belief leading to behaviour, which leads to a result that reinforces the original thought. For example, if you hold the belief that "I'm bad at statistics," you may drop the course or lower your expectations to barely pass (behaviour), leading to not doing very well on the exam (result). This result reinforces your belief that you are bad at statistics (a self-fulfilling prophecy leading to a fixed mindset).

In contrast, the self-fulfilling prophecy changes if you believe that learning statistics is a skill that will take a lot of effort, so you work hard, practice, and maybe get help on assignments (behaviour). The result is that your grade improves in this course, reinforcing your belief that everyone needs to exert effort to succeed (a self-fulfilling prophecy leading to a growth mindset).

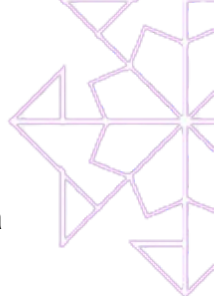
How much effort do you need for success?

Ericsson et al. (1993) explore the role of deliberate practice in an extraordinary performance. Deliberate practice is reflected by continuous effort, over and over until you get results. Their results show that it often takes ten or more years of struggle before people get to the top of their field:

- It takes a chess player 11 years from when they first learned the rules of chess to become an international master.
- After first learning to play a musical instrument, it will be 20 years before the musician composes an outstanding piece.
- The average age at which poets publish their first piece is 24, while the average age at which the same poets created their most significant work is 34.

Things take time and effort. Unfortunately, it is rare for talent alone to be enough for success (p.363–406).

There are so many inventions that started as accidents or mistakes. Instead of giving up or seeing it as a failure, the people involved used it as an opportunity to do something else with their invention, for example,



**Post-it notes.** In 1968, Spencer Silver, an engineer working for 3M (a.k.a. the Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing Company), tried to develop an adhesive for the aerospace industry. He created a weak, pressure-sensitive adhesive that the company did not find any use for, even though someone could peel it away without leaving a residue. Then, five years later, a chemical engineer working at 3M sang in a choir and often lost his place in the hymn book. He had the idea to use the adhesive to keep the bookmarks marking his place in the book. And post-its were born.

**Pfizer** originally developed Viagra to treat high blood pressure and chest pain (due to heart disease). However, in clinical trials, they discovered that Viagra was more effective in inducing erections in men. So Pfizer changed the name and re-marketed it with this new purpose.

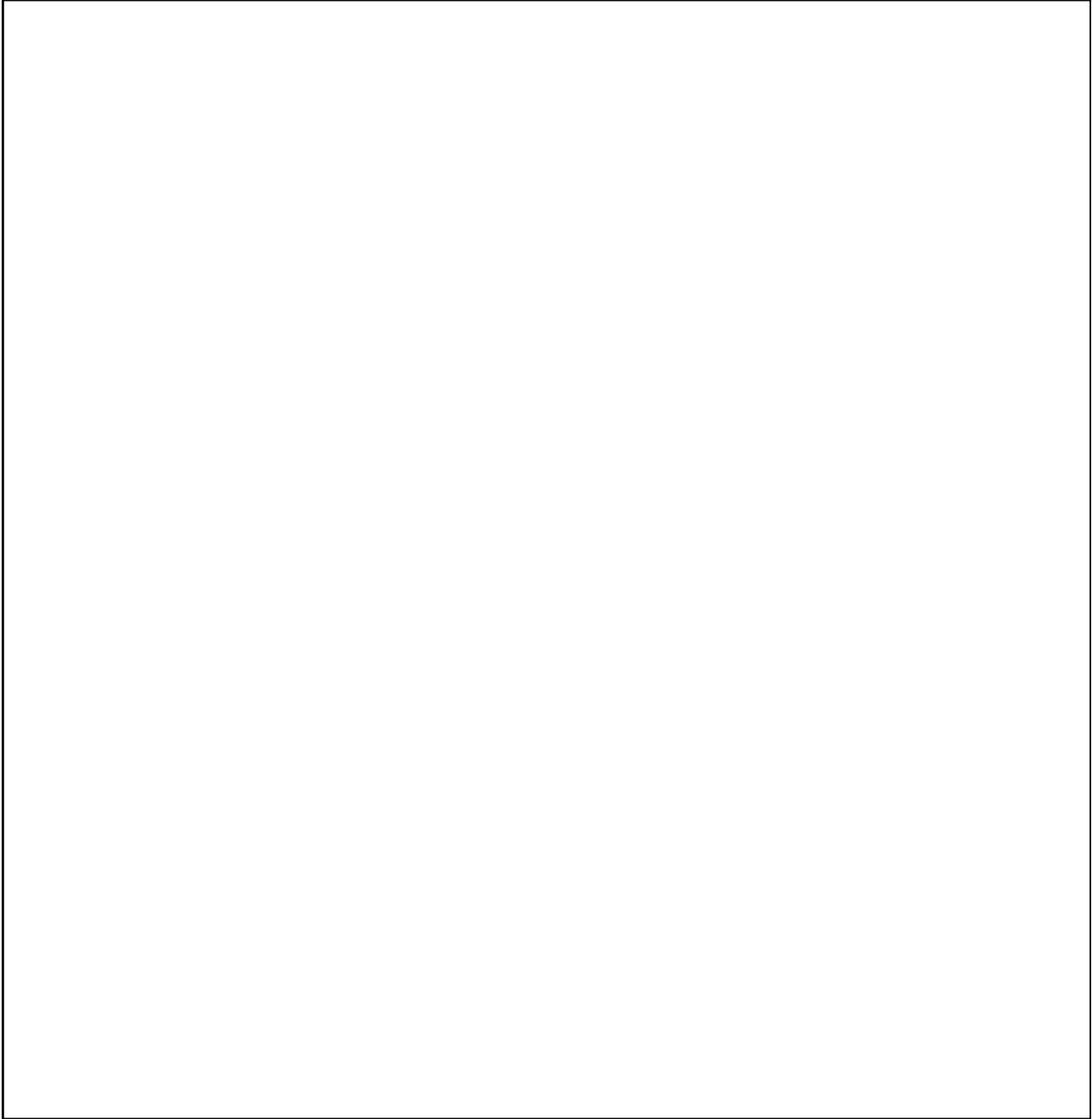
**Silly Putty.** In 1944, American engineers were asked to develop a substitute for rubber out of silicone in WWII. They invented what became known as Silly Putty by adding boric acid to silicone oil, but since it wasn't effective as a rubber substitute, they put it on a shelf. Then, in 1949, when a toy store owner teamed up with a marketing consultant, they found a creative use for the substance and sold it as a toy to children. It has been on the market ever since.



## Writing Prompt

Best Mistakes - Describe the best mistake you ever made.

Free-write for 4 minutes.

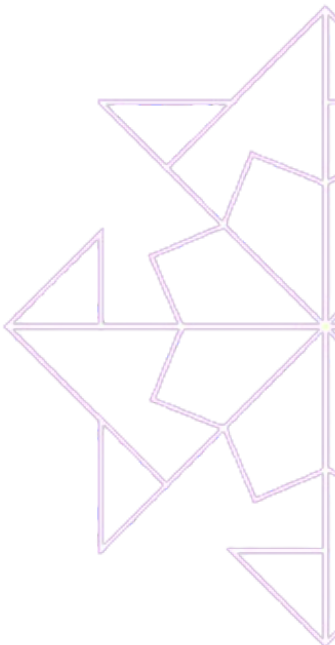


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# Learning Strategy



## Week Seven: Awe and Group Work

Along with its mention in week five, we reintroduce the concept of awe into the conversation as we delve into group work. We encourage students to be open to shifting their perspective from their day-to-day academic activities, allowing room for a broader view of their academic journey by zooming out to a bird's-eye perspective.

We start by showing a [video on murmuration](#) to set the stage for the conversation. As a refresher, we define the experience of awe and ask students to share their understanding of awe and the last time they experienced it. Then, we build on the conversation from week five and discuss the connection between awe and school, as well as the student experience.

### **Reminder**

#### **Awe:**

- Is more vast, immense, or complex than day-to-day activities.
- Difficult to hold or understand easily, so we need to make space for it and adjust.
- Is a larger-than-life feeling, promotes resilience because our day-to-day perspectives and experiences are challenged; our usual assumptions and ruts and negative patterns of thoughts are disrupted.
- Disrupts the usual flow of time and other constraints.
- Helps us find or remember a sense of purpose because it gets us in touch with the larger world.
- Can help reinspire curiosity and engagement, helping us to feel more interested and keener to explore.
- Can help with group work and collaboration because it nourishes compassion and connection.
- Helps bring back into focus “what is important,” and because of that, it increases generosity and spaciousness

#### **Why is it good for school?**

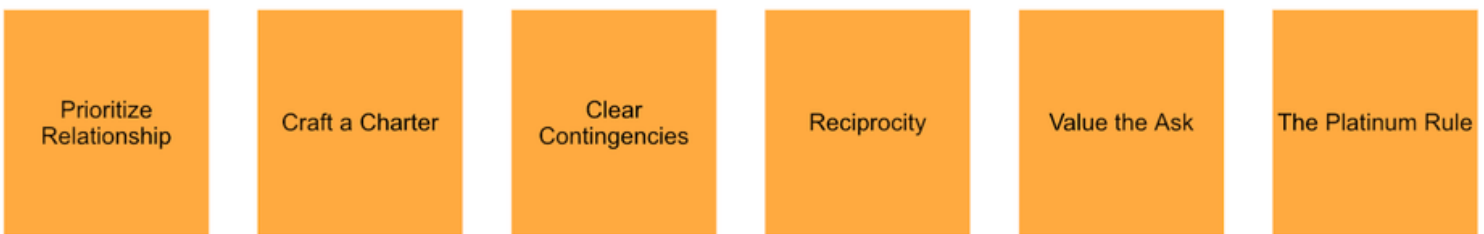
- Brings out curiosity and creativity.
- Studies show it increases our openness to learning.
- Enhances willingness to participate (Rudd, et al., 2018).
- Awe helps physiological resilience too, by supporting the nervous system.

If you are interested in expanding your session, you can incorporate [exercises on practicing awe from 'Thriving in Action Online: Practicing Awe.'](#) Additionally, you can dive deeper into awe research by exploring [the Greater Good Science Center at Berkeley University website.](#)

## Collaborative Group Work

When transitioning to the topic of group work, we create space for students to share their experiences with it. After students have shared, we revisit the concept of perspective shifts and encourage them to take a broader view. We invite students to consider group projects not just tasks to complete but as opportunities to practice self-advocacy, learn from their peers, deepen their understanding of course content, and even explore new roles within a group dynamic.

We provide the visual below to students and guide them through each step as presented on [Thriving in Action Online: Appreciative & Collaborative Group Work.](#) The outline is also provided below for convenience.



### Prioritize relationship

- Share a meal or a walk together with group project members. If budgets are tight, bring tea or try a potluck. 'Breaking bread' is a universal way to strengthen bonds. Share a walk or nature experience together. On a hike or stroll with someone, your gaze is fixed ahead, noticing the things around you. This lowers the pressure and intensity of looking into another's eyes in conversation, all the while the bonds between people deepen.



## Community charter

- Build an inclusive culture of inquiry by ensuring a brave space for each group member to speak about the barriers they experience and how they wish these to be seen, held, and responded to.
- Make it safe to ask questions.
- Frame questions appreciatively.
- Provide time and space for responses, honouring the quick-talkers and the ‘mullers’.
- Establish collective commitments.
- Ask for what you need.
- Ask, “what do I need to know about you?”.
- Avoid digging or probing.

## Communicating contingencies

- Early on, decide as a community what the process will be if someone does not come through. Make a transparent and shared backup plan. For example, milestones or mini-deadlines could be established to keep the workload manageable and moving, and everyone is granted a 24-hour grace period before the what-if back-up plan kicks in. Talk together, ahead of time, about when it would be appropriate to communicate with the professor and request their help.

## Re-enlivening reciprocity

- Consider what can be given. So often, the focus is on what we each want and need, further amplified by tight deadlines and end-of-semester fatigue. However, flip this and ask, what can I offer? Perhaps it is baking a treat for a group meeting, starting a group prep session with mindfulness meditation or an energizing song, or putting your character strengths or technical skills to group benefit.

## Generosity & the Platinum Rule

- Most of us know the Golden Rule, namely, to treat others as you would want to be treated. However, what about the Platinum Rule, which is to treat another how they wish to be treated? Have each team member articulate how they want to be treated—is it with flexibility, patience, or compassion?

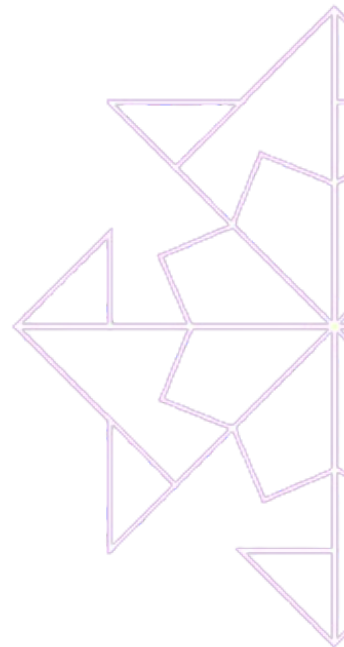


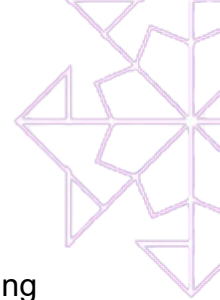
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# Week 8





This week focuses on relationships, namely, how to connect, with compassion, to oneself and others. After a lesson on self-compassion, during which students are reminded about how and why to be their best friend, a writing prompt is offered that helps nurture connecting inwardly and outwardly. In the learning skills lesson, students explore self-advocacy and learn how to practice it in higher education. Additionally, they are taught professional communication through email.

### **Week 8 Includes:**

- Thriving Strategy: Self-Compassion
- Writing Prompt: Being Your Own Best Friend
- Learning Strategy: Self-Advocacy

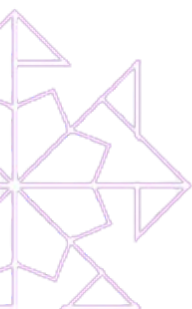
### **Thriving Strategy: Self-Compassion**

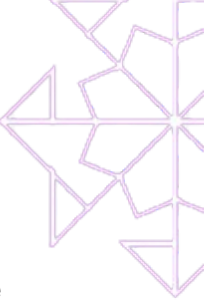
Three essential components to thriving are interconnected: first, we must be self-aware enough to know what we need; second, we need to engage in the self-care required to get us back on our feet; and, finally, we need to forgive ourselves for making mistakes and getting into difficult situations.

Self-compassion helps to counterbalance students' harsh inner criticism. Learning to forgive yourself and others increases resilience and positive emotion. There are several options of videos to watch together that can stimulate discussion:

1. [Kristin Neff's TEDx Talk](#) The Space Between Self-Esteem and Self-Compassion.
2. [Weiyang Xie's TEDx Talk](#) Dare to Rewire the Brain for Self-Compassion.
3. [Betty Hart TED Talk](#) Canceling cancel culture with compassion.

Consider asking your students about a time when someone showed incredible compassion and sensitivity towards them. What was the context? What did this person say, and how did they say it? What tone of voice did they use, and how did they demonstrate compassion? How did your student feel after receiving compassion from someone who cares deeply? Once you have helped your students recall the situation in full, they will be better equipped to engage in self-compassion intentionally.





Self-compassion and forgiveness go hand in hand. When we can let go and forgive someone who has trespassed against us, it also creates space for us to forgive ourselves for being in the situation in the first place. You can ask your students: why now? What are they hoping to achieve if they put this incident or relationship behind them? How will things be different in the future? Letting go and moving on is an essential aspect of resilience and well-being. The relief your students will feel after engaging in this exercise will free up energy to focus on the present and future instead of the past.

The self-compassion model is comprised of three concepts that complement and overlap:

1. Mindfulness - seeing one's suffering clearly in context.
2. Our common humanity - we all suffer at times.
3. Being kind, caring and supportive to oneself

Kristin Neff tells us that self-compassion is positively linked to:

- Less anxiety and depression
- Lack of self-criticism
- Less rumination
- Higher motivation to learn and grow
- Lower levels of stress (and stress hormone - cortisol)
- Higher levels of well-being
- Higher ability to cope with divorce, early childhood trauma & chronic physical pain
- improved relationships

Self-compassion is negatively linked to maladaptive perfectionism. Often, participants need an explanation for this link. A simple way to explain it is that if someone is highly perfectionistic, they're not likely to be self-compassionate. And if perfectionists increase their capacity to be self-compassionate, they will likely become less perfectionistic.

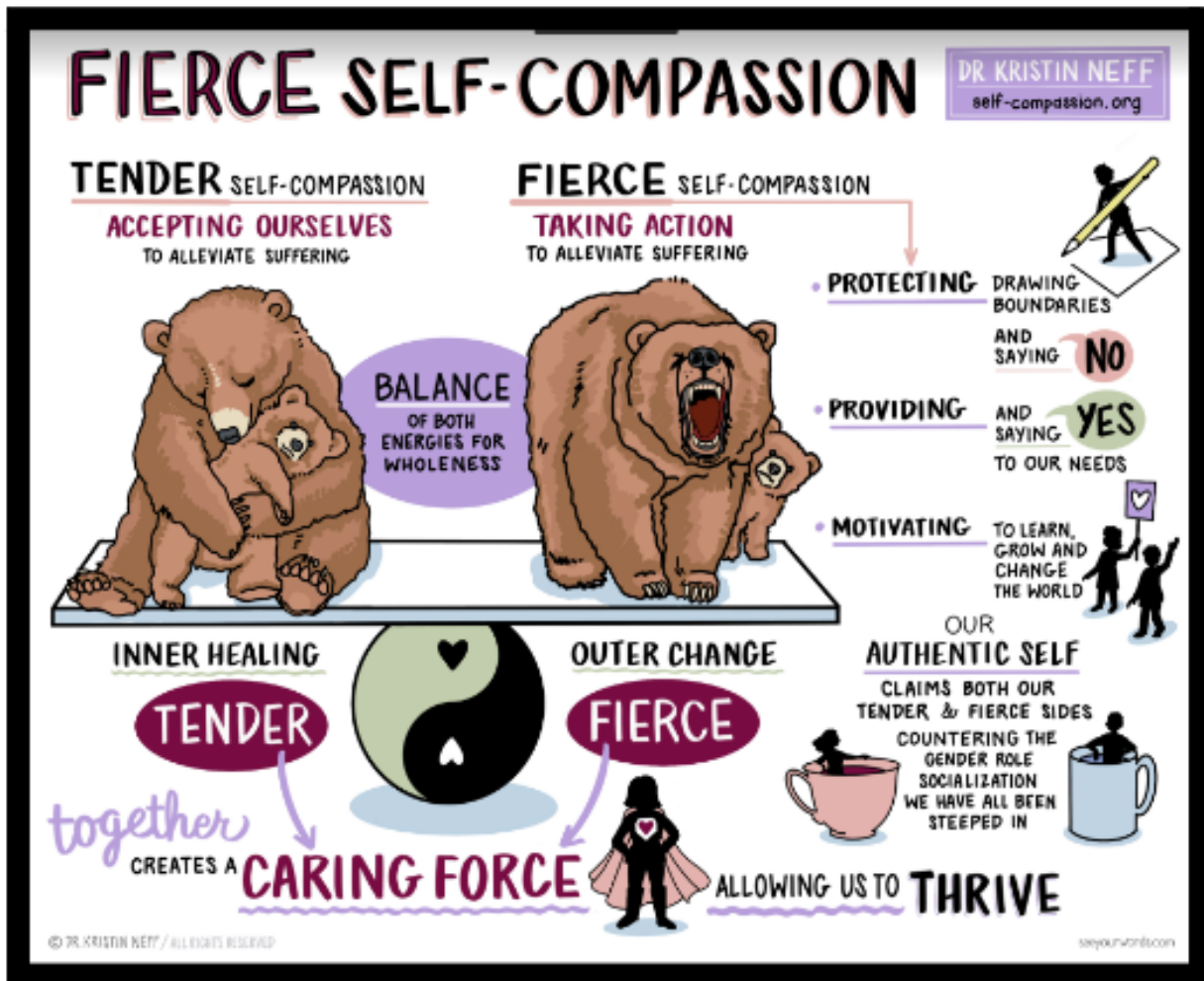
How Can Self-Compassion Improve Our Capacity To Build Our Resilience?

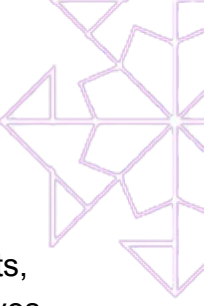
The Five-Factor Model of Resilience comprises mindfulness, gratitude, optimism, self-compassion and perseverance/grit (Brecher, 2017).

We often need to forgive ourselves for getting stuck, failing, or having poor judgment; ultimately, we need to transcend the limitations of our current situation. One pathway to forgiveness is to treat ourselves as we would our closest friends. Of course, showing compassion to a friend is easier because we are not caught up in the narrative of why things went wrong and self-blame. But even so, we still know how to do it. And are deserving of this kindness. Permitting ourselves to be kind to ourselves, forgiving ourselves for our mistakes, and accepting that we are in this situation now, but not forever, can all help us cultivate our resilience and bounce back.

Another definition of self-compassion can be an invitation to be our best friend, kind, supportive, patient, and loving in the moments we need most.

### What About Fierce Self-Compassion?





Neff (2021) wrote a book titled *Fierce Self-Compassion*, exploring the other side of self-compassion. She describes fierce self-compassion as action, out in the world, setting limits, defending others through social action, and sometimes choosing to say no to others and yes to ourselves. She describes it as protecting, providing for and motivating ourselves and others to social justice and action. Neff suggests that the #MeToo movement can be understood as a form of fierce self-compassion.

The infographic on the previous page is from Neff's Self-Compassion website. It depicts the differences between tender self-compassion (in which we focus on self-acceptance and self-care to relieve suffering) and [fierce self-compassion](#) (a "Mama Bear" type stance in which we take action to ease the suffering of others as well). The bottom line of the infographic and this research is that "Tender and Fierce—together create a caring force allowing us to thrive."

Neff (2021) observes that we need both types of self-compassion to feel balanced. And that tenderness without fierceness leads to complacency, while fierceness without tenderness leads to aggression. She suggests that we need both the Yin and the Yang - each completing the other to create balance within ourselves.

It is essential to distinguish self-esteem from self-compassion. Self-esteem implies that we are good at the things that are important to us and that we are valuable, worthy and capable. It is the reputation we have with ourselves, about ourselves. "I am the kind of person who is \_\_\_\_\_" fill in the blank (honest, trustworthy, funny, hardworking, etc.). Self-esteem demands that we are perceived as above average. This concern leads us to compete with others and put them down to feel good about ourselves.

### **Self-Esteem at the Edges**

Exaggerated self-esteem can become a form of prejudice that occurs partly due to the feeling that your group is superior to others. Narcissism is also an extreme form of self-esteem, in which the individual believes themselves to be better than those around them to build and bolster their shaky confidence.

Betty Hart proposes replacing "cancel culture" with "compassion culture" and explains why. She refers to a classic definition of compassion as the capacity to suffer with someone. She focuses on the importance of connection to build the bridge between ourselves and those with whom we disagree. Watch this [Betty Hart TEDx Talk](#) video (2016).



## Self-Compassion and Self-Pity

Self-pity is often experienced as a form of self-indulgence. Self-pity isolates us, and we forget that others have and will suffer similarly. In contrast, self-compassion motivates us to be free of suffering. Mindful self-acceptance, kindness and generosity of spirit free us from feeling stuck and help us re-group and move out of our suffering.

Watch this [Dare to Rewire Your Brain for Self-Compassion TEDx Talk](#) (2018), with psychologist Dr. Weiyang Xie, who describes how the brain is impacted by shame and self-criticism and how it changes when we engage in self-compassion.

Questions to pose to your students after watching this video:

In what ways was Weiyang Xie's shame over her self-criticism familiar to you, either in your own life or to someone close to you? How did understanding the neuroscience of modifying our self-talk to cultivate self-compassion impact you?

## What About Emotional Regulation?

Paul Gilbert, a British psychologist, is the founder of Compassion-Focused Therapy. He described three circles of emotional regulation and emphasized the soothing system as essential to cultivating compassion. The Infographic is in the slide deck.

There are three core systems of emotional regulation:

- Drive System (based on our pursuit of achievements --it can lead to perfectionism if extreme).
- Threat System (based on our assessment of physical and psychological threats, both internal & external).
- Soothing system (designed to cultivate safety, nurturance, and connection).

Paul Gilbert observed that we all move between these three emotional regulation systems but often focus on the Drive and Threat systems, neglecting the Soothing system. The Soothing system is the one we need to cultivate self-compassion by releasing oxytocin.

# THREE CIRCLES OF EMOTIONAL REGULATION

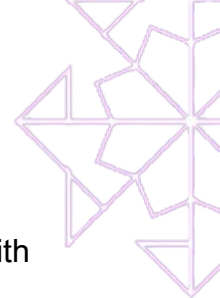
According to Paul Gilbert's model, people often switch between three different systems to manage their emotions.



In order to help you get a sense of where you might be out of balance, your practitioner may ask you to imagine how big each of your circles is.

Adapted from Gilbert, P. (2009). *The Compassionate Mind: A New Approach To Life's Challenges*. London: Constable and Robinson.





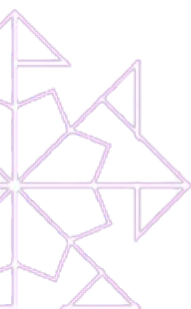
## Exercises:

Tapping into the Mammalian Caregiving System (and triggering the feelings associated with self-compassion):

Self-compassion is self-reliance. We can inner-resource the comfort we need through our gentle touch and activate the release of oxytocin. This touch leads to an increase in trust, calm, safety, generosity, and connectedness. The Soothing system is also known as the rest and digest system. Activating this system leads to increased self-compassion.

- Try putting both hands over your heart and spend a few moments, with your eyes closed, breathing slowly into your heart.
- Or put one hand on your heart and one on your belly. Breathe deeply with your eyes closed, focusing on the calm that should follow.
- Another option is to cup one cheek (or both) and take deep, restorative breaths with closed eyes.
- You could also try hugging yourself with closed eyes and taking deep breaths.

Through these actions, we can tap into the mammalian caregiving system. By activating the release of oxytocin, we can effectively comfort ourselves and generate feelings of self-compassion, which we know can ultimately contribute to resilience.



Another way to cultivate self-compassion is to get in touch with how it feels when someone else has been compassionate towards us. Being forgiven usually requires compassion on the part of the forgiver. Reflecting on the impact of forgiveness is a doorway into self-compassion and self-forgiveness. So, think back to a time when someone forgave you. How did they express their forgiveness to you? How did you react? What were the benefits of being forgiven, and what did you learn from the experience? How did your relationship change as a result of your being forgiven? After this reflection, consider forgiving yourself for an error in judgment or thoughtlessness. Self-compassion is about being your best friend – supportive, gentle, & understanding without any judgment. Self-compassion is a gift that you give yourself.

Lyubomirsky (2007) suggests writing a letter of forgiveness to someone who has hurt you. First, describe what they did and their behaviour's past and present impacts on you. Then, tell this person how you wish they had behaved instead. At the end of the letter, state that you have forgiven them. Decide if you want to send it to this person or not. Either way, you might find a weight lifted. The person who benefits most from forgiveness is yourself. One Buddhist proverb says not forgiving is like holding a burning rock and expecting the person you can't forgive to get burnt.

This [Loving kindness meditation](#) is designed to enhance a sense of connection to our community and our planet. It also serves to help us get in touch with our shared humanity. After meditating as a group, leave time to debrief and explore how students may react to this meditation.

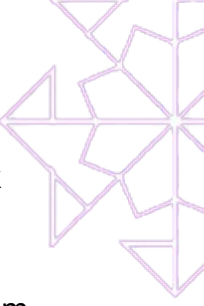


### **Self-Acceptance Narrative**

Linda Graham (2013) is the author of [Bouncing Back, a book on resilience](#). She developed this self-acceptance narrative based on the idea that we free up the energy and emotional resilience to move on as we change perspective.

Imagine a spiral staircase with a hollow space in the centre. Walking up the spiral staircase, you can look down into the hollow space, representing the troubling event. Each time you go around the stairs and return to the same spot but one story higher, you can look down and realize that your perspective has changed.

Linda Graham (2013) suggests five steps to a self-acceptance narrative (pg 82). Try this exercise using the metaphor of the spiral staircase depicted above, in which each time you climb to another level, your perspective on the same event (at the bottom of the stairs) changes.



**Step 1:** This is what happened (describe your struggle or challenge). Most of us get stuck telling the story without seeing how to escape it.

**Step 2:** This is what I did to survive it. Walk up a flight of stairs and look down to the bottom of the staircase. Has your perspective changed? Tap into your self-compassion to see what you did to survive the situation as if it happened to someone else.

**Step 3:** This has been the cost. Walk up another flight of stairs, look down and notice how things may have shifted for you. Tap into your wisdom with kindness and a generosity of spirit. It can make it safer to assess the cost to your well-being at the time. This deeper understanding means you may no longer need to linger over what happened. You can focus on what you learned about yourself and the world with less distress.

**Step 4:** This is what I learned. Walk up yet another flight of stairs and, as you look down again, identify what you have learned and create a new narrative of self that allows you to be proud of yourself. Finally, you can begin to let the rest go.

**Step 5:** This is how I respond to life now. Walk up the final flight of stairs. You are at the top of the spiral staircase, free from the original problem. Your perspective has shifted. You have carried forward what was valuable and could be applied in a new situation. And the rest is now in the past.

What might it feel like if you could transform a problematic situation into something you accept for what it was and treasure for what it taught you?



## Writing Prompt:

"You can search throughout the entire universe for someone who is more deserving of your love and affection than yourself, and that person is not to be found anywhere. You, yourself, as much as anybody in the entire universe, deserve your love and affection."

–Attributed to the Buddha



Choose one of these four prompts to write about over the next 4 minutes:

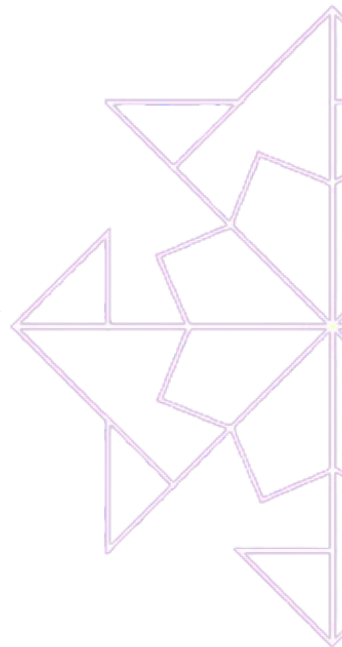
1. Describe your happiest memory
2. Observe your qualities: Consider someone you admire and write down everything you have in common with them.
3. Find connection. Jot down all the ways that make you feel connected to humanity, contemplating what connects you to everyone else and the larger world.
4. Treat yourself like you would treat a friend: Consider a problematic interaction or relationship you have recently or are currently experiencing. Imagine yourself now as your own best friend.

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# Learning Strategy



## Week Eight: Self-Advocacy

The discussion about self-advocacy begins as a sharing space to learn what students believe self-advocacy is and how they have encountered it in educational settings. To ensure everyone is on the same page, we provide two definitions of self-advocacy in the context of being a student.

- “Self-advocacy is essentially about knowing yourself, being able to promote yourself and your skills while speaking to any challenges you may face... and being able to request the accommodations you need. Self-advocacy is a skill that is developed. It takes practice.” (“Success in STEM,” n.d.)
- “Self-advocacy refers to an individual's ability to effectively communicate, convey, negotiate or assert his or her own interests, desires, needs, and rights. It involves making informed decisions and taking responsibility for those decisions.” (Van Reusen, Nos, Schumaker, & Deshler, 1995)

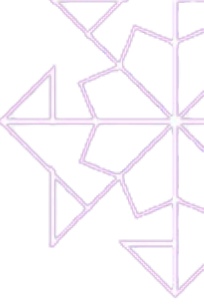
[Thriving in Action Online provides an overview of how we teach this section. You can view it here or continue reading below.](#)

### We discuss what self-advocacy can *look like* for students

- Building up the confidence to talk about themselves and share their story.
- Deciding what and what not to disclose and to whom.
- Reaching out for help, suggestions, or guidance.
- Asking for support, even if they are unsure of what they need.
- Taking a central seat at the table in any discussions about their education.
- Preparing, listening mindfully, asking questions, and taking notes at any meetings about their academic path.
- Getting familiar with their rights and responsibilities, including knowing about and adhering to important dates and deadlines (and asking for help on how to respect deadlines).


### We discuss how students can *practice* self-advocacy

- Developing and maintaining relationships with their faculty and department
- Introductions should be made early on in the semester to build rapport.
- Attending office hours.
- Proactively address accommodation needs and do so well in advance.
- Maintaining proactive, positive relationships with the key support staff with whom they interact, like program advisors.

- 
- Familiarize yourself with the processes and procedures of the services that will be used (e.g., Academic Accommodations, Counselling Centre, etc.).
  - Keeping track of timelines and important dates.
  - Learning about what-if or plan B procedures, drop dates, missed classes, or what to do about a missed test or assignment deadline due to disability, illness, or life event.
- **Co-creating a culture of respect, reciprocity, and care by treating all people with fairness and dignity**
    - Being mindful about tone and language when speaking or emailing with instructors, department contacts, and support staff.
    - Ensuring that contact is timely, particularly if making a request.
    - Being aware that response and wait times will vary and be lengthy—in this way, aim to get in touch, make appointments, and make requests as soon as they are able.
    - Accept that they may receive a ‘no’, and that there are also myriad work and life pressures experienced by each person that they may contact.
  - **Cultivate, re-examine, or rebuild healthy coping strategies**
  - Examine what behaviours and habits have helped (or harmed) you in the past.
  - Prioritize healthy interactions over escalation, confrontation, demands, silence, avoidance, passive-aggressiveness, or being overly hard on yourself.

We end by discussing how self-advocacy is a skill that they will likely build over time and that university is a great place to continue to practice strengthening it! As a wrap-up exercise, we go through an example of how to send an email to a professor. The notes and gentle reminders below for email are shared with all students in the slide deck so they can easily reference it when they need to.



- 
- Dear \_\_\_\_\_, **assume formality** to start, and use Dr. or Professor; if unsure **check your course syllabus** or their institutional online profile.
  - Open with a **single, kind, short, authentic sentence**, like “I hope you had a good weekend” or “I enjoyed yesterday’s lecture”.
  - Then **identify yourself clearly**, “I am in your class \_\_\_\_\_,” listing course code, section, and title of the course.
  - Keep it brief, warm, and **avoid all slang/text/overfamiliarity** (“OMG,” “LOL”).
  - **Ask clearly and concisely for what you need.**
  - Consider including a sentence that outlines, without justifying or overstating, what you have already tried.
  - Sign off with **politeness**, your name, and your student number.
  - Carefully **review and revise before sending**, ensuring concision, correct spelling, and appropriate language.

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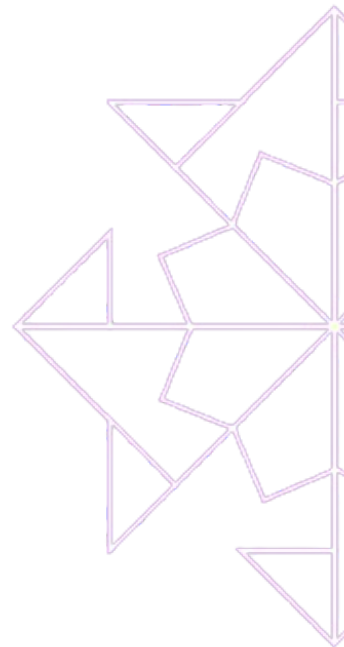
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# Week 9



## Week 9: Procrastination and Digital Learning Resources

This week's focus lies on procrastination, understanding the concepts of time affluence and time famine, and leveraging this knowledge to mitigate procrastination behaviors. Students will be prompted to reflect on a first, when they have confronted something, they feared or dreaded. Additionally, in the learning skills lesson, students will be provided with digital tools to aid their time management, enhance their studying experience through practice questions, support their reading, and much more. Furthermore, they will receive a curated list of YouTube content creators offering valuable insights and tools for effective learning strategies.

- Thriving Strategy: Procrastination
- Writing Prompt: Taking the Plunge
- Learning Strategy: Digital Learning Resources

Timothy Pychyl (2010), the author of *Solving the Procrastination Puzzle*, states, "...when we procrastinate on our goals, we are putting off our lives...to author our own lives, we have to be an active agent in our lives, not a passive participant making excuses for what we are not doing." He defines procrastination as the "needless, voluntary delay of our goals." (pg. 2)

The costs of procrastination are -

- Reduced performance
- Psychological well-being is diminished
- Physical health is negatively impacted

And the cumulative effects of repeated delays add up.

The warning signs of procrastination are:

"It's not due for weeks."

"I can do that work in a few hours."

"I work better under pressure."

"I'll feel like starting tomorrow."

"It's not that important."

## Two fundamental biases keep us from getting started on tasks:

### 1. Affective forecasting -- "I'll feel like doing it tomorrow."

When we forecast how we will feel tomorrow, we tend to feel good about things in the present (as we experience considerable relief while lifting the burden of having to do the task now), combined with the belief that we will feel like it and feel good about doing it tomorrow. "Happiness now—pay later."

You can avoid affective forecasting by following your plan, not your mood. Treat your future self with compassion and care instead of treating your future self like a stranger to whom you owe nothing. An additional strategy is to use the 15-minute rule: set a timer, get started, and commit to the first 15 minutes of a task. You can walk away when the timer goes off, but if you have momentum, keep going. The point is to get started!

### 2. Preserve your Self Esteem:

It is an attempt to preserve your self-esteem by reducing the effort or time you put into the task, thereby justifying your subsequent poor performance.

An alternate approach could be to commit and dive into the task: do the work at your best pace and give yourself time to edit and polish, resulting in feeling good about the grade you earned.

## Strategies to Overcome Procrastination:

An important intervention is to **Bridge the Intention-Action Gap**:

1. Create 'approach' goals (articulate the goal by identifying what you want to do, learn, and achieve), not what you want to avoid. For example: 'I want to improve my grades in all my courses,' instead of 'I want to get off academic probation.'

2. Plan *If...Then* or *When... Then* statements.

For example: If I finish this chapter...then I will give myself a 15-minute break.

When I brush my teeth... then I will pick up the floss and floss my teeth.

When I get out of bed in the morning...then, I will do my morning stretches.

**Strengthening Goal Intentions** can be helpful. Try filling out a chart like the one below

<b>Task, Project, Goal, Activity</b>	<b>Costs associated with procrastination</b>	<b>Benefits of acting in a timely fashion</b>
Complete an assignment	I experienced last-minute stress when I finally got started.	I am staying on top of my workload and understanding the material. I feel good about myself and reward myself with time off with friends.
Study for a quiz	Poor performance; regretfully, I didn't ask for help from a classmate, TA or instructor during office hours	I understand the course content when I'm tested on it. I feel good about myself, get a good grade, and reward myself by playing my favourite game

**Build the Willpower Muscle:**

- Get 7-9 hours sleep nightly.
- Do the most demanding things earlier in the day (exercise, challenging assignments, job search) (unless you are a night owl – then reverse it).
- Do some things that help you to feel good/optimistic - willpower is more straightforward when you are feeling positive.
- Make a When...Then or If...Then, plan and follow it.
- Attend to the body - drink water before a complex task and eat a fruit to fuel willpower.
- Focus on your values and goals and let them motivate you.
- Practice a self-regulatory task and stick to it for a few weeks. (e.g. good posture, writing with your non-dominant hand, diet).

## Explore How to be Time Smart:

Ashley Whillans (2021), a Harvard Business School professor, introduces the notion of changing our relationship to time. She asks: "Why do some of us experience time famine and others experience time affluence? What if we were to adopt a new attitude towards time?"

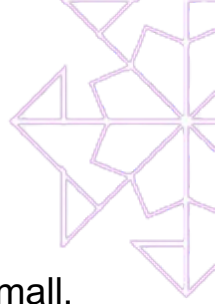
**Time Affluence:** Your subjective sense that you have enough free time and abundant time at your disposal.

**Time Famine:** You feel like you are 'starving for time' in the subjective sense that you never have enough time... (something has to 'give').

## Strategies for Being Time Smart:

- Use your tiny pockets of free time (confetti) and do something worthwhile for you. Make a confetti 'to-do' list.
- Find ways to love what you are doing (even on the edges of your primary purpose).
- Build a boundary between your workday/school day and free time.
- Practice 'uni-tasking' and take planned breaks.

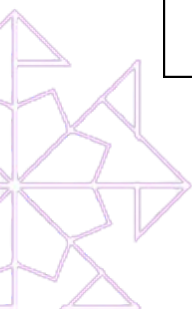
The fundamental strategy to being time smart is to list what you can do with the short (3 - 10 minute) timeframes between meetings, between classes or before you are expected at work. Instead of scrolling on your phone, what if you did a short meditation, walked around the block, danced to your favourite music, journaled something important, and did a few stretches? Anything that fills your time with something that rejuvenates, refreshes or is just fun. This 'time confetti' adds up over a day.



## Writing Prompt: Taking the Plunge

Write about a first; something you feared and dreaded. It can be something small, like the first time you gave a presentation or drove a car by yourself; or something big, like the decision to go back to school and get that degree you've always wanted...a decision for which you had to muster courage. Write about how that felt or, if you are in the midst of it, how it feels. Write about taking on something you never thought you could handle: trying school again, making that public presentation, writing a twenty-page term paper, leaving a destructive relationship, cooking a meal for thirty people. What was it? What made you decide to do it? What role did other people play in your decision? How did you feel before you did it? Confused? Conflicted? Afraid? How did you feel afterwards? What did you learn from the experience?

Start with "When I first thought about doing..." and write non-stop for 4 minutes.







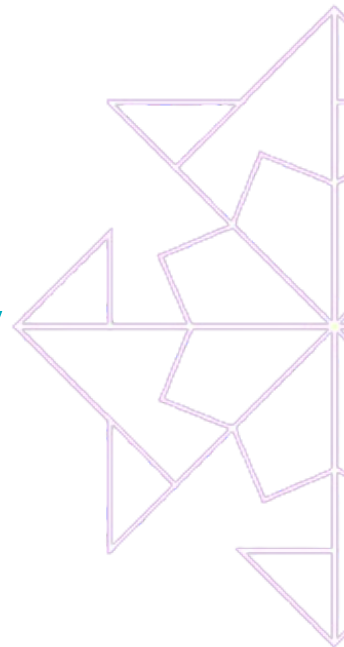
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# Learning Strategy



## Week Nine: Digital Tools and Resources

Numerous digital tools and resources are available to students. Within TiA, we emphasize that these tools and resources can serve as helpful additions to a student's toolkit. This section covers the most commonly suggested apps, tools, and creators for further exploration.

- Time management tools:
  - [Assignment Planner](#)
  - [Motion App](#)
- Study Tools:
  - [Anki Flashcards](#)
  - [Quizlet](#)
- Essay-writing tools:
  - [Rewordify.com](#)
  - [Quillbot](#)
- Note-taking applications for tablets:
  - [Goodnotes](#)
  - [Notability](#)
- Reading Tools:
  - [Bionic Reading](#)
  - [Speechify](#)
- Organization systems:
  - [Notion](#)

This section highlights a list of YouTube creators who discuss strategies related to cognition, well-being, and more!

[Ali Abdaal](#)

[Elizabeth Filips](#)

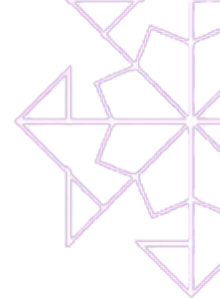
[Amy Landino](#)

[Jeff Su](#)

[Mariana Vieira](#)

#### Additional Resource

- [Trello accessible technology \(software\)](#)
  - This Trello page serves as an evolving resource created by student support professionals. It provides comprehensive information about various types of accessible technology available to students, including details on usability, cost, user guides, and more.



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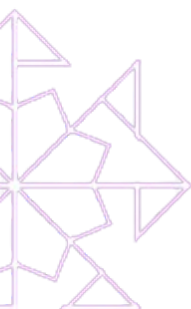
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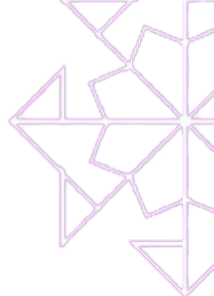

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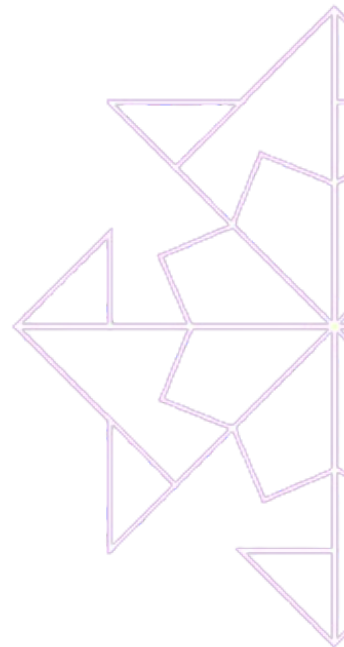
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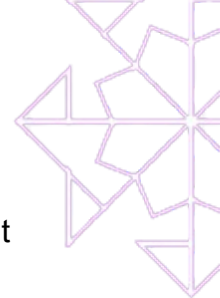
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# Week 10





## Inside Looking Ahead & Bringing It All Together

This week's summative session coheres to the threads and themes of Thriving in Action. It is a time and place of savouring, reflection, and questions. This penultimate lesson comprises the conceptual models underneath the thriving and learning skills, making overt what has scaffolded the approaches and recommendations all the way along.

### Week 10 Includes:

- Thriving Strategy: The Five-Factor Model of Resilience & Growth Mindset
- Writing Prompt: With Thanks
- Learning Strategy: Five Features of Wide Awake Learning

### Thriving Strategy: Five-Factor Model of Resilience

The relatively new discipline of positive psychology proposed by Martin Seligman (2002) in his book *Authentic Happiness* and expanded in his book *Flourish* (2012) indicates five dimensions of well-being and flourishing: positivity, engagement, relationships, meaning, and achievement. Emiliya Zhivotovskaya, who founded the Flourishing Center in NYC, later added the concept of vitality. Resilience, integral to flourishing, is threaded throughout.

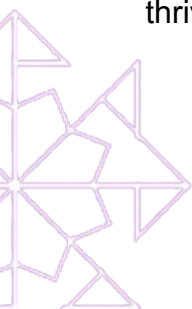
The Five Factor Model of Resilience was developed by Diana Brecher (2016). This is how she describes it:

I became interested in how to teach resilience as prevention and reduce the need for intervention after the fact. I aimed to teach resilience so people could bounce back and ultimately thrive before getting stuck in distress.

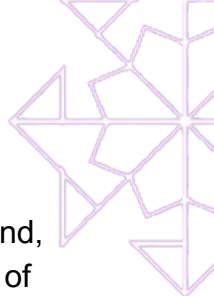
I thought about what my years as a psychologist taught me about surviving and thriving. From this, I constructed this profile of someone who is struggling to thrive:

- She tends to ruminate about the past and worry about the future;
- She seems to be unaware of the good things that are happening in her life;
- She explains why things happen to her from a pessimistic perspective;
- She is judgmental and self-critical;
- She often gives up when feeling overwhelmed.

If resilience is the capacity to bounce back after things go wrong, what must people learn to thrive?







Think of the Five-Factor Model of Resilience as a puzzle with mindfulness in the centre and, going clockwise, gratitude, optimism, self-compassion, and grit radiate. Each component of this puzzle connects and enhances the others, particularly in times of crisis.

## **Mindfulness**

I think of the absence of mindfulness as a form of time travel, either ruminating about the past or worrying about the future. Mindfulness is about being simply present at this very moment. It allows us to take stock and gather resources. Being mindful keeps us grounded in the actual situation and realistically focused on solutions and actions that will make a difference.

## **Gratitude**

Gratitude is not simply saying “thank you” when someone does you a favour. Gratitude in this context is about noticing good things happening all around you and taking it in-- savouring good experiences, the kindness and generosity of others, opportunities that have opened up and the possibilities you could explore. It’s about relationships and gratitude to the important people in your life that seem to make life worth living. Gratitude also fosters feelings of connectedness and hopefulness.

## **Optimism**

How we explain why good or bad things happen to us significantly impacts our ability to bounce back. Martin Seligman, a psychologist at the University of Pennsylvania, discovered that optimists explain good times to themselves as something they caused directly or had a significant role in instigating; they perceive it as permanent, and it spills over into other aspects of their lives. Optimists feel the glow of achievement and have hope for the future. Similarly, when something bad happens, optimists explain it to themselves as bad luck, temporary, and very situation-specific. Optimists have more energy to be resilient and take action to resolve challenging situations because we haven’t spent our energy feeling scared and filled with self-recrimination and hopelessness like pessimists tend to do. The good news is that we can learn to change these explanations and thus become optimists.



## **Self-Compassion**

When things go wrong, we tend to blame ourselves for everything. We are highly self-critical and impatient with our human flaws. Kristin Neff, a psychologist at the University of Texas at Austin, encourages us to ask, what if, instead of being so self-critical, we could be our best friend? Kind, supportive, patient, and loving in the moments that we need it most? Cultivating this practice of being your own best friend is integral to resilience.

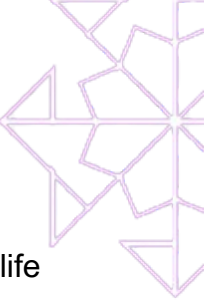
## **Grit**

Angela Duckworth, a psychologist at the University of Pennsylvania, defines grit as perseverance and passion for long-term goals in various contexts. I believe cultivating the ability to overcome setbacks, losses, and hurdles is equally crucial in our personal lives and achievement.

Grit is essential to my Five-Factor Model of Resilience because it is based on a choice we can make to stick to our goals despite the hurdles we face.

## **Personal Model of Resilience**

Even when we don't feel like it, we already have these attitudes and skills of resilience within ourselves. Grit comprises our strategies, behaviours, attitudes and beliefs. We can tap the grit from a successful aspect of our lives and apply it to other areas in which we struggle, as needed. This transfer of attitudes and behaviours is the essence of resilience. Christine Padesky, a psychologist and author of *Mind Over Mood*, suggests that when we do something we love regularly, we keep going, no matter what. Obstacles are perceived to be temporary and surmountable. Our faith in these successful strategies and attitudes is justified because they are familiar and trustworthy in one context - all we need to do is transpose these to another situation and discover how they might work there. By importing our behaviours from a successful context to an area where we struggle, we can deal with a new challenge and succeed. Recognizing these strategies, behaviours, attitudes, and beliefs becomes our model of resilience.



Resilience is a combination of being fully present and mindful, noticing the good things in life and all the possibilities before you, giving yourself credit for the good things that happen with hope and zest for the future, forgiving yourself for things that have gone wrong; and tapping your already proven strengths to use them in service of the challenge before you. This Five-Factor Model of Resilience is grounded in best practices research within positive psychology and flourishing, and 25 years of experience working with university students who want to thrive and be their best selves.

### **Learning Strategy: Growth Mindset**

#### **The Spirit Behind Growth Mindset as a Learning Strategy**

Reminders, reflections upon, and fostering a sense of hopefulness, all skills we can learn, are vital to the impact and magic of Thriving in Action. These come together in this brief lesson on Growth Mindset this week. Prompted by a video cleverly summarizing Angela Duckworth's core teachings, students engage in a guided reflection on Growth Mindset.



## Writing Prompt: With Thanks

Make a list of five things that you feel grateful for right now. This may be something that happened today, like getting a seat on the subway. This can be something that you have had in your life for years, like the support of someone close to you who cheered you on through your darkest moments. It can be something small or something big. Take a deep breath and focus on what you feel thankful for right now; when you finish making the list, free-write about one of the things for five minutes.

Created by Natalya Androsova, Former Writing Programs Specialist, Student Learning Support, TMU.

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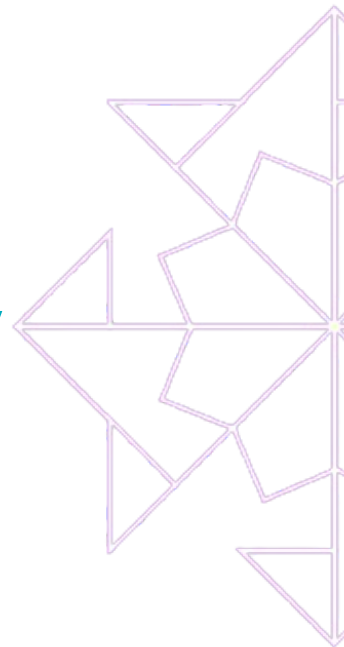
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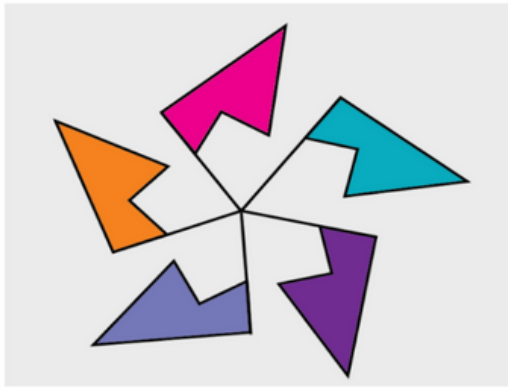


# Learning Strategy



## Week Ten: Learning Model

The learning strategies of Thriving in Action are guided by the Five Features of Wide-Awake Learning, as developed by Deena Kara Shaffer in 2018. The concept of wide-awake learning was inspired by the educational scholar Maxine Greene's (1977) use of the term 'wide-awakeness.'



**Practiseability**  
**Attention Restoration**  
**Well-being/Being Well**  
**Connectedness**  
**Agency**

### Deena Shaffer's Pedagogy (Brecher & Shaffer, 2019, 2023)

- practice takes variables like luck, talent, and prior learning and instead prioritizes learnable skills.
- Attention helps to alleviate distractedness by rebuilding the ability to focus.
- Well-being (and being well) emphasizes that wellness, health, and vitality are not 'nice to haves' or things that come after school work but are crucial to academic success.
- Connectedness prioritizes the importance of relationships, mutuality, and belonging.
- Agency bolsters intentionality, in-sourcing, and putting into action what one envisions, aspires to, or decides upon.

## Adapting, Adjusting, and Moving Forward

We continue to embed learning strategies that align with the principles of wide-awake learning, providing holistic approaches that are accessible to students. We aim to bolster academic confidence and self-efficacy by prioritizing these five features. This is achieved by offering various options and methods to initiate each strategy and focusing on user-friendly approaches, such as the Pomodoro method, verbal brainstorming for essays, incorporating intentional pauses while taking notes, and nature immersion to support focus and concentration. We delve into behaviours and habits that students can modify within the educational context and discuss the cumulative effects they can have over time.

Once students grasp the basics, we introduce additional supportive tools. However, we always begin with the fundamentals to ensure all students are on the same page and build from there. We embrace new tools and technologies that align with TiA and engage in open conversations about how digital tools can complement and enhance learning strategies. Ethical use of these tools is also a crucial aspect of our discussions, with the most up-to-date information provided by our institution.

Moving forward with TiA, as we continue to expand the toolkit of strategies available to students, we emphasize the importance of inner resourcing within wide-awake learning. We highlight how students can tap into their expertise and self-awareness when identifying areas for change. While we serve as guides to support their perspective shifts and provide waypoints for practicing these changes, we emphasize that students can and should leverage their strengths. By implementing these learning strategies, they can work towards a routine and schedule in higher education that allows for more time for activities they truly enjoy. This, in turn, hopefully contributes to a sense of ease throughout their university experience.





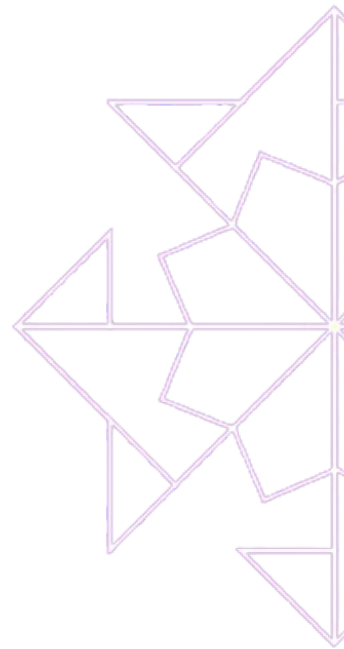
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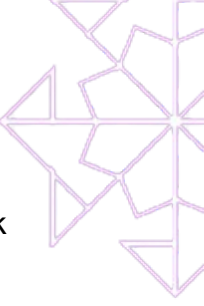
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# Appendices

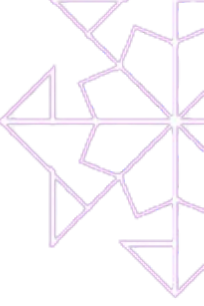


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- A. “What Went Well?” to begin the session, followed by a robust discussion of why we ask this question and suggestions as to how to continue the process once the program concludes
  - B: Passages film and discussion
  - C: Students share an ‘artifact’ of their choosing (physical or described) that symbolizes the impact of Thriving in Action
  - D: As a final exercise, students write a letter to themselves
  - E. Circle of Joy Script
  - F. Meditation Scripts
  - G. Progressive Relaxation Script



# Appendix A: Why “What Went Well, and Why?”

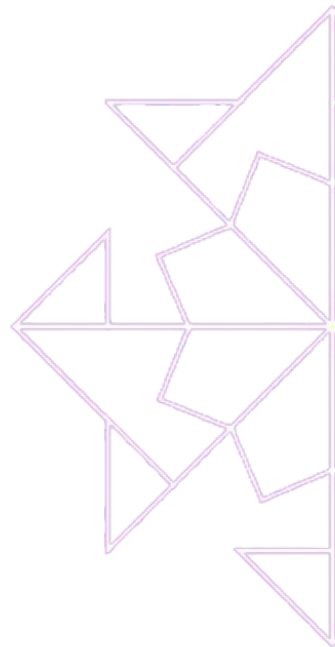


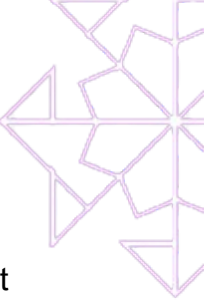


Each week, we begin our sessions by posing to the students the same question, “What Went Well, and Why?” It riffs off of Martin Seligman’s “three good things” exercise and research. Seligman clarifies how potent intentional noticing and gratitude work can be in influencing our mood and countering our negative bias. And so we utilize this technique with our students to help them notice the good, even if subtle, even if it was just showing up to the Thriving in Action session that day. “What Went Well?” also helps to create ever longer reprieves from the trap and rut of “busy,” “tired,” or “stressed” as habitual fallbacks--not to dishonour the exhaustion or unrelenting pace at times of being a post-secondary student, but to shine a spotlight, again and again, on the hopeful and positive, even if it is seemingly minor. “Holding steady,” a kind text, or a sleep-in, are as welcome and celebrated in Thriving in Action as a high grade. Above all, “what went well” helps students shape their attention, thoughts, and emotions by redirecting their focus to the stories and information they typically dismiss. By adding the ‘Why’? We invite students to explore their role in making good things happen, inviting a sense of ownership and cultivating a stronger sense of agency in bringing on these positive events.



# Appendix B: Passages





One option is to offer a [guided viewing of the Film, “Passages.” You can access the two-minute Trailer and Film here.](#) In watching this Film, students can recognize different parts of themselves, their experiences, and their academic and personal journeys. Particularly poignant, as Thriving in Action cohorts comprise students from their second year of undergraduate to those pursuing doctorates, is the theme of transitions that undergirds “Passages.” Transitions are a theme often relegated to incoming students or those ready to graduate onto more schooling or into the professional world. But we regard mid-stream students as experiencing their unique transitions, and indeed, Thriving in Action is designed to support times of change. The Film is presented as a curricular offering and a jumping-off point for rich reflections and conversations.

[You can download a copy of the Passages Companion Guide here.](#)

Some suggested Post-Film Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

- What, if anything, surprised you in this film? (What were your expectations?)
- In what ways does this film make you think differently about your own education? (Or does it?)
- What questions emerge for you from the ambiguity of the film? (Are you disoriented?)
- What do you think the title “Passages” means? (What would you have named the film?)
- With whom or with what ideas did you identify? (Can you see yourself in this film?)
- What stayed with you? (Why do you think that is?)
- What voices are missing from the film? (What were you hoping to hear?)
- In what ways is the campus a character in the film? (Did you notice the locations?)
- What is the purpose of this film? (Something different today than yesterday?)
- Wait six weeks (or so) and come back to these questions

**Reference:**


Toronto Metropolitan University Student Wellbeing (Producer), & Hannah, J., Kawai, J., & Wickiam, V. (Directors). (2017). Passages [Motion Picture]. Retrieved from <https://www.torontomu.ca/studentaffairs/storytelling/ureally/passages/>



# Appendix C: Inside “Artifacts”



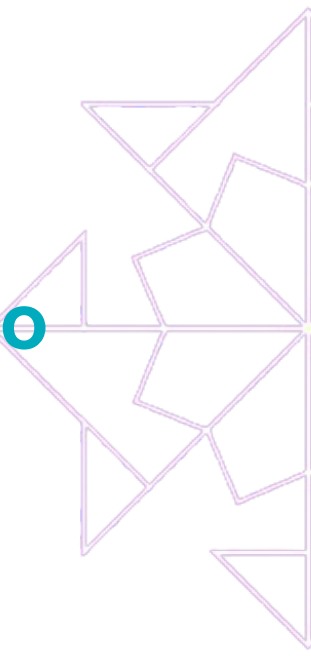





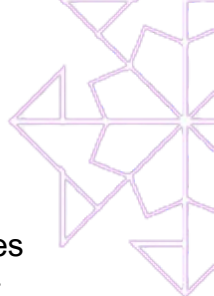

Before the final session, students are asked to prepare an artifact that houses, symbolizes, or somehow captures the academic and personal impact(s) of the Thriving in Action strategies. Students can create something and tell a story; it is not intended to feel burdensome or assignment-like. Instead, it is a time of celebration, deep reflection, and gratitude.

One of the most compelling aspects of the Thriving in Action program is the effect students have on each other: they hear, try out, and adopt each other's strategies; they form friendships and caring networks that check in on each other. This peer learning comes to light and is cherished in this final week.

And, too, students hear the creative ways their peers are experimenting with, combining, and implementing the thriving and learning skills offered. Thriving in Action is never prescriptive, so unique combinations of skills are welcome and intended; this is the very undercurrent of the program, and this thriving artifact 'marketplace' is an opportunity to showcase these.



# Appendix D: Inside “Letter to Self”

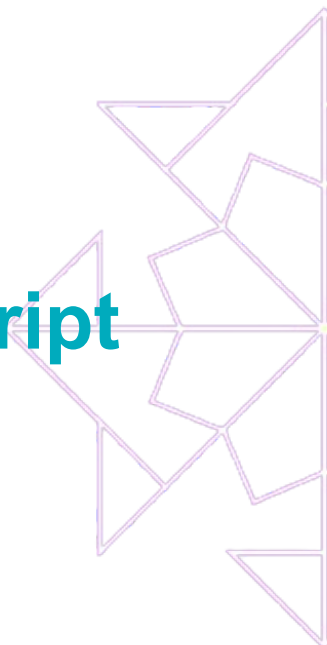


Instead of a standard writing prompt, students are asked to write reminders for themselves as they continue the year and their degree post-Thriving in Action. Students can interpret this in any way they choose: some might treat the exercise as a diary entry, others as a gratitude letter, and some may highlight what skill or tool has felt most resonant. All interpretations are welcome. Instead of sending students off to do this at home or alone, space and time is set aside in this session and is treated as relapse prevention.

Without judgment, pressure, or obligation, we request that students allow us to photocopy these letters during this session to put towards our qualitative inquiry.



# Appendix E: Circle of Joy Script





[You can find a video demonstrating the movement on the Thriving in Action Online website.](#)

## Circle of Joy Routine

We teach this mindful movement practice, Circle of Joy, to empower students to take intentional physical breaks during the day, bring attention to their breathing and their bodies and notice whether fatigue or tension is present, and as a learning strategy itself to break up distracted studying or stuck essay-writing.

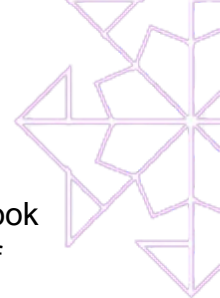
We model both full and modified versions and remind students to listen carefully to what their bodies communicate, thus not overstretching or pushing. Instead, we invite students to treat these few minutes of ultra-aware, aware, quiet movement as an opportunity to let go of striving, competition, and pushing. In this way, students practice agency by choosing to, for example, do the postures while sitting or standing and an invitation to breathe, attending carefully to their unique needs, sensations, injuries, and so forth.

This particular iteration of the Circle of Joy is inspired by and adapted from SMARTEducation as taught by [http:// www.mindfulnesseveryday.org/](http://www.mindfulnesseveryday.org/).

This is a very untechnical, accessible exercise; there is tremendous flexibility to modify as you feel appropriate. Take additional inhalations and exhalations, pause for shorter or longer times, and add or omit movements, whatever seems right for you and your students.

Circle of Joy:

1. Reminder: Please hear and mind what your own body is telling you, whether to stay still, back off, or go deeper. You are welcome to remain seated, stand with eyes closed or gaze lowered, and simply focus on your breath. If doing the Circle of Joy feels right for you today, please join me in standing, ideally away from your desk and with a bit of space to move freely. You are welcome to take off any cumbersome accessories or your shoes.
2. Come into standing and feel your feet firmly on the ground. Notice the four corners of your feet--your toes, your heels, and the inside and outside edges of your feet. Aim to rest in the middle, neither tipping too far forward or back. Feel the full sensation of groundedness, of the firm foundation under your feet.



3. As for your posture, notice whether your head is tilted down, as we often do when we look at our phones and computer screens, and try to bring it to neutral, lengthening the back of your neck and tucking your chin ever-so-slightly in. Our aim in standing is not a judgment about our posture but an invitation to dignity and uplift. To start the Circle of Joy, gently touch your hands in front of you with your fingertips.

4. Inhale: Raise your hands slowly to chest height with the tips of your fingers still touching.

5. Exhale: Interlace your fingers and push them away, palms out.

6. Inhale: Raise your interlaced hands overhead, palms turned towards the sky.

7. Exhale: Shift your hands to one side, feeling a side stretch.

8. Inhale: Return back to centre.

9. Exhale: Shift your still-clasped hands to stretch the other side.

10. Inhale: Return back to centre.

11. Exhale: Unclasp your fingers and slowly lower them while stretching as if you were feeling the sides of a balloon until your outstretched arms are parallel to the floor.

12. Inhale: Bring vitality to your hands, palms facing out, fingers pointing up to the sky, even tilting your fingertips towards your body ever so slightly.

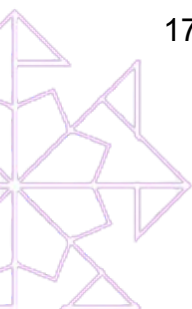
13. Exhale: Twist gently to one side with your arms still wide. (If space is an issue, students can use “cactus arms” by bending at the elbows and bringing their arms into ninety-degree angles.)

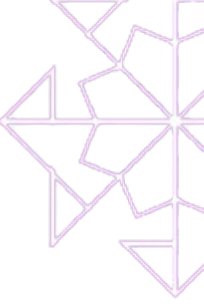
14. Inhale: Bring energy to your arms and hands. (For a deepened twist, students can look towards the backs of their hands.)

15. Exhale: Come back to centre.

16. Inhale: Re-energize your arms and hands.

17. Exhale: Twist in the other direction.



- 
18. Inhale: Bring full intention and energy to your arms, hands, and spine.
  19. Exhale: Come back to centre.
  20. Inhale: Clasp your hands behind your chest and breathe into your heart.
  21. Exhale: (Optional, and with tremendous care.) For those students who feel safe and comfortable, you can begin to take a forward bend, keeping a slight bend in your knees. (This can be deepened by bringing your clasped hands overhead towards the ground.)
  22. Inhale: Take a deep breath here, releasing tension in your back.
  23. Exhale: Drop your arms and hands and dangle them towards the floor. (Students may wish to clasp their elbows.)
  24. Inhale: Slowly round back up to standing, as if like a rag doll.
  25. Breathing in your own rhythm and with eyes (still) closed or soft gaze lowered, keep your attention still inwardly, noticing what it feels like to be in your body. What do you feel? Softened? Becalmed? Energized? What is your body telling you? Are you tired and need more sleep? Are you thirsty or hungry for nourishing food? Do you need more fresh air or a loving embrace today?
  26. Take another moment of your own here, feeling your feet still firmly planted on the ground, feeling your breath, feeling even your pulse or blood flow, and remembering that you are a tender breathing being doing the best you can right now.



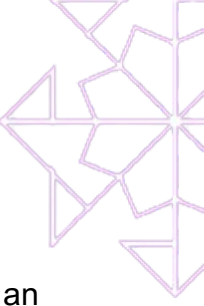
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Mindfulness Everyday. (n.d.). *Circle of Joy Routine* [Website].  
<http://www.mindfulnessseveryday.org>





# Appendix F: Meditation Scripts



These guided visualizations embody subtle and powerful metaphors that can inspire and support students during stressful times. For example, the mountain visualization provides an inspiring message that no matter what life throws at them, they can remain as grounded and strong as a mountain in a storm. Similarly, the lake meditation explores the idea that it is possible to cultivate an observer stance; no matter how many emotions are churned up, we can stand back and notice without getting caught up in the chaos. This level of awareness allows us to detach ever so slightly from the drama and be in the present moment.

Recordings of these meditations can be found through SoundCloud, on the [ThriveTMU website here](#).

### **Three-Minute Breathing Space**

*Adapted from Zindel V. Segal's Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy for Depression*

This exercise is a way to step out of 'automatic pilot' and invite an awareness of the present moment.

### **Purposeful Posture**

Position yourself so you can sit comfortably but away from the back of your chair, if possible. Bring length to your spine and keep a sense of softness about your posture. Rest your hands on your lap, lift each foot carefully, and gently place them back on the ground. Tuck your chin in slightly, towards the chest, and then close your eyes or look down towards the ground.

### **Focus on the Breath**

Bring your awareness inward, and begin to focus on your breath. Paying attention to the inhale, as your breath travels in through your nose, down your throat and into your lungs, and then to the exhale, as your breath travels out from your lungs, up through the throat and out through your nose or mouth. In this way, you can bind your awareness to your breath. There's no need to change your breath in any way; there's no need to make it deeper or fuller. Just notice the natural rhythm and pace of your breath. It may even be helpful for you to say to yourself: "I am breathing in; I am breathing out."

### **Awareness**

Now, bring awareness to the physical sensations in your body. Noticing the floor underneath your feet, the chair underneath your legs, or other sensations in your body, including places of pressure, contact, or temperature. PAUSE. Now, bring awareness to your thoughts and notice what is popping into your mind. There is no need to get pulled in by these thoughts; as best as you can, just notice them as they occur and let them go.



**PAUSE.**

Now, bring awareness to your feelings, perhaps noticing where they are in your body. Notice any qualities linked to those feelings, and do not get wrapped up in what they might mean.

**Expanding**

Expand your awareness to your whole body to sense your head, torso, arms, and legs resting in the chair. Simply get a sense of the whole self, being here in this present moment. You might even imagine that your entire body is breathing itself with each inhalation and exhalation.

**PAUSE.**

When you're ready, open your eyes if they have been closed, and bring awareness back into the room to close the practice.

## Lake Meditation

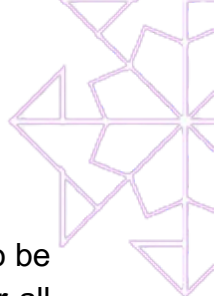
Adapted with permission by The Mindfulness Edge TM from <http://www.mindfulness everyday.org/>

This meditation is done in a lying or reclining position. It begins by paying attention to the sensations of contact and support as you lie here, noticing where your body is making contact and how your weight is distributed on the floor, bed or recliner. Actually sensing into your body, feeling your feet, legs, lower and upper body, arms, shoulders, and head.

When you are ready, bring awareness to breathing, the actual physical sensations, and feel each breath as it comes in and goes out. Letting the breath be just as it is, without trying to change or regulate it in any way. Allowing it to flow easily and naturally, with its rhythm and pace, knowing you are breathing perfectly well right now, with nothing for you to do, allowing a sense of being complete, whole, in this very moment, just letting your breath be your breath. As you rest here, let an image form in your mind's eye of a lake, a body of water, large or small, held in a receptive basin by the earth itself, noting in the mind's eye and your own heart that water likes to pool in low places, it seeks its own level, asks to be held, contained.

Letting this image gradually come into greater focus. Even if it doesn't come as a visual image, allowing the sense of this lake and feeling its presence...The lake you're invoking may be deep or shallow, blue or green, muddy or clear. With no wind, the surface will be flat, mirror-like, reflecting trees, rocks, sky and clouds, holding everything in itself momentarily. Wind may come and stir up waves, causing the reflections to distort and disappear, but then sunlight may sparkle in the ripples and dance on the waves in a play of shimmering diamonds. When night comes, it's the moon's turn to dance on the lake, or when the surface is still, to be reflected in it along with the outline of trees and shadows. In winter, the lake may freeze over yet be teeming with movement and life below.

As you rest here breathing, as you establish this image of a lake in your mind's eye, allowing yourself, when you feel ready, to bring it inside yourself completely so that your being merges with the lake, becomes one with it, so that all your energies at this moment are held in awareness with openness and compassion for yourself, in the same way as the lake's waters are held by the receptive and accepting basin of the earth herself.



Breathing as the lake, feeling its body as your body, allowing your mind and your heart to be open and receptive, moment by moment, to reflect whatever comes near, or to be clear all the way to the bottom—experiencing moments of complete stillness when both reflection and water are completely clear. And other moments, perhaps when the surface is disturbed, choppy, stirred up, reflections and depth lost for the moment.

And through it all as you lie here, simply observing the play of the various energies of your mind and heart, the fleeting thoughts and feelings, impulses and reactions, which come and go as ripples and waves, noting their effects. In contact with them, just as you are in contact with and feel the various changing energies that play on the lake, the wind, the waves, the light, the shadows and the reflections, the colours and smells—noticing the effect of your thoughts and feelings. Do they disturb the surface and clarity of the mind's lake? Do they muddy the waters? Is that okay with you? Isn't having a rippling or a wavy surface a part of being a lake? Might it be possible to identify not only with the surface of your lake but with the entire body of water so that you become the stillness below the surface, which at most experiences only gentle undulations, even when the surface is choppy and ragged?

In the same way, in your meditation practice and daily life, you can be in touch, not only with the changing content and intensity of your thoughts and feelings but also with the vast, unwavering reservoir of awareness itself, residing below the surface of your mind. The lake can teach this and remind us of the lake within ourselves.

If you find this image valuable, you may want to use it occasionally to deepen and enrich your meditation practice. You might also invite this lake image to empower you and guide your actions in the world as you move through the unfolding of each day, carrying this vast reservoir of mindfulness within your heart. Dwelling here in the stillness of this moment until signalled by the sound of the bells, we can be the lake in silence now, affirming our ability to hold in awareness and acceptance, right now, all our qualities of mind and body, just as the lake sits held, cradled, contained by the earth, reflecting sun, moon, stars, trees, clouds and sky, birds and light, caressed by the air and the wind, which bring out and highlight its sparkle, its vitality, its potential, moment by moment.

So, in the time that remains before the bells, which will mark the end of the meditation, continue to sustain the lake meditation on your own, in silence, moment by moment, being the lake with its own storms and moments of peace.

## Lovingkindness Meditation

*Adapted from Jon Kabat-Zinn, Mindfulness Meditation, CD Series 3*

In this meditation on lovingkindness, allow yourself to switch from the usual mode of doing to a mode of non-doing - simply being. As your body becomes still, bring your attention to the fact that you are breathing. And become aware of the movement of your breath as it comes into your body and as it leaves your body. Not manipulating or trying to change the breath, but simply being aware of it and the feelings associated with breathing, and observing the breath deep down in your belly. Feel the abdomen as it expands gently on the in-breath and falls back towards your spine on the out-breath.

Being totally here in each moment with each breath, not trying to do anything or get any place, simply being with your breath and giving full care and attention to each in-breath and each out-breath. As they follow one after the other in a never-ending cycle and flow. If distracting thoughts arise, acknowledge them, then return to the practice.

And now, bringing to mind someone for whom you have deep feelings of love. Seeing or sensing this person and noticing your feelings for them arise in your body. It may be simply a smile that spreads across your face or your chest becomes warm. Whatever the effects, allow them to be felt.

Now, letting go of this person in your imagination and keep aware of the feelings that have arisen.

1. Bring yourself to mind now. And see if you can offer lovingkindness to yourself by letting these words become your words:

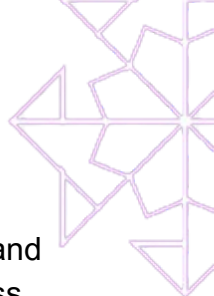
May I be safe and protected and free from inner and outer harm

May I be happy and contented

May I be healthy and whole, to whatever degree possible

May I experience ease of well-being

Notice the feelings that arise and let them be as you look within yourself with mindfulness and equanimity.



2. When you are comfortable, try offering lovingkindness to someone who supports you and has always “been on your side.” Bring this person to mind, imagining them perhaps across from you, and let these words become your words:

May you be safe and protected, and free from inner and outer harm

May you be happy and contented

May you be healthy and whole, to whatever degree possible

May you experience ease of well-being

3. Once your feelings flow effortlessly to a loved one, turn your attention now to someone with whom you have difficulty — it’s best not to start with the most challenging person but perhaps someone who brings up feelings of irritation or annoyance. And see if you can let these words become your words as you keep this person in awareness:

May we be safe and protected and free from inner and outer harm

May we be happy and contented

May we be healthy and whole, to whatever degree possible

May we experience ease of well-being

4. And now, bringing to mind the broader community you are a part of. You might imagine your family, your workmates, your neighbours. And including yourself in this offering of lovingkindness, as you let these words become your words:

May we be safe and protected and free from inner and outer harm

May we be happy and contented

May we be healthy and whole, to whatever degree possible

May we experience ease of well-being

Notice the sensations and feelings that arise within you.

5. Now, fan out your attention until you include all persons and creatures on the planet. And including yourself in this offering of lovingkindness, as you let these words become your words:

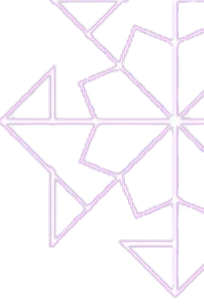
May we be safe and protected and free from inner and outer harm

May we be happy and contented

May we be healthy and whole, to whatever degree possible

May we experience ease of well-being

Notice the sensations and feelings that arise within you. Sitting with them for a few moments.



6. And now include the entire planet as the focus of your offering of lovingkindness, including yourself in this offering, as you let these words become your words:  
May we all be safe and protected and free from inner and outer harm  
May we all be happy and contented  
May we all be healthy and whole, to whatever degree possible  
May we all experience ease of well-being  
Notice the sensations and feelings that arise within you. Sit with them for a few moments until you are ready to finish the practice.





## Ocean Meditation

Adapted with permission by The Mindfulness Edge™ from <http://www.mindfulnessseveryday.org/>

Taking our seat in a posture that embodies dignity. Let your attention go to wherever the breath comes to you naturally. Let your awareness ride the wave of the breath, wherever you feel it most naturally, your nostrils, your chest, your belly, or for some people, it's the whole body breathing, whatever comes naturally for you, and just let your attention ride the wave of your breathing.

(PAUSE)

As you're sensing your breath in and out. I'm going to tell you an ancient story that's been passed through the generations about the mind being like the ocean; where deep in the ocean, beneath the surface, it's calm and clear, and from that deep place in the ocean, you can look upward toward the surface; and at the surface no matter what the conditions are; whether it's flat or choppy, or even a full storm, no matter what those conditions are, deep in the ocean, it's calm and clear.

Just sensing the breath allows you to go to the depth of the ocean of your mind, where from this deep place, you can look upward at the waves at the surface, the brain waves that are the activities of your mind. From this deep place in your mind, you can notice the thinking, the feeling, perceiving, all these things that are just there at the surface, and notice them as being activities that come and go in and out of awareness, like ripples on a pond; and just sensing your breath brings you back to this deeper place in the depth of your mind. As the stress mounts and your attention is divided and scattered, it can be helpful to go deep into the ocean of your mind, where you can observe the surface but not engage in it.

So, let's take a few moments right now to sense your breath, and when an activity of the mind brings your attention to it, like a thought, feeling, memory, or sensation, then kindly and gently redirect your attention to the breath. For some people, it helps to make a gentle mental note, so if there is a thought, you can gently say in your mind, like a whisper in the back of your mind, "thinking." If there is an emotion, you can gently say "feeling," or if there is a sensation, you can gently say "sensing" and let your attention return to the breath to this depth of your mind where you can sense and observe the activities of the mind as just that, just activities, and not the totality of who you are. So let's take the time now, just sensing your breath, and when you notice that your mind is no longer focusing on your breath, kindly and gently take note of that and return your attention to your breathing.



(PAUSE)

Now, in just a few moments, we'll bring this meditation to a close. Focusing your mind on breathing can bring you to a deep place of calm and clarity.

## Mountain Meditation

Adapted with permission by The Mindfulness Edge™ from <http://www.mindfulness everyday.org/>

We will practice a visualization called the “Mountain,” starting by assuming a mindful standing posture (demonstrate). This sets the tone – and intention – for what we are about to do.

Picture the most beautiful mountain you have seen, or you can imagine one whose form speaks to you personally, noticing its overall shape from its peak to its base. The mountain is standing tall and strong. It has been there for thousands of years.

Perhaps your mountain has snow at the top and trees on the lower slopes. Perhaps it has one prominent peak or a series of peaks. Just allow yourself to stand and breathe while observing the image of this mountain.

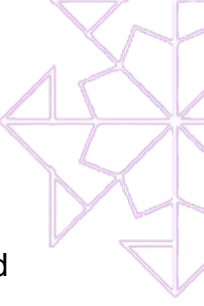
(PAUSE)

And when you feel ready, see if you can bring the mountain into your own body so that your body & the mountain become one in your mind’s eye. Your head becomes the lofty peak. Your shoulders and arms are the sides of the mountain, your torso and legs the solid base rooted to the floor.

Inviting yourself to become a breathing mountain, unwavering in your stillness, completely what you are. Beyond words and thoughts, a centred, unmoving presence. Words and thoughts, a centred, unmoving presence.

(PAUSE)

All around the mountain, the weather changes from beautiful sunny skies to rain, hurricane-force winds, snow and ice... but the mountain always stands firm... the activity just whirls around the mountain but does not affect it daily.



In our lives and meditation practice, we experience light and dark periods: vivid colour and drab dullness. Storms of varying intensity and violence exist in our outer world, lives, and minds—enduring periods of darkness and savouring moments of joy. Even appearance changes constantly, just like the mountains, experiencing a certain type of weather and a weathering of its own. The stress of midterms and pressures to produce assignments and projects on time can swirl around you, yet you remain strong and unwavering in your ability to feel grounded and solid as the mountain.

By becoming the mountain, we link up with its strength and stability and can use these energies to encounter each moment with mindfulness, balance, and clarity. Helping us to see our thoughts and feelings, our preoccupations, and our emotional storms are much like the weather on the mountains. Not to be ignored or avoided but felt, known for what it is, and held in awareness -coming to know a deeper silence, stillness, and wisdom within the storms.

(PAUSE)

Letting the thoughts, stress, and anxiety whirl around you without affecting you. The thoughts are just thoughts. The feelings are just feelings. They are not the totality of who you are. You are a mountain standing strong. You are who you are and have always been, regardless of the “weather” around you.

(PAUSE)

Breathing in and out. Standing with that feeling of power and majesty. And your deepening capacity to dwell in stillness- carrying these qualities into your daily life.



## Progressive Muscle Relaxation Script

*[Always caution students that if they have an injury or condition that would indicate that tensing a particular muscle group is ill advised, they should simply ignore your instructions about that muscle group or location (neck, back, feet or wherever) and focus on their breathing during that set of instructions].*

Progressive muscle relaxation is an exercise that reduces stress and anxiety in your body by having you slowly tense and then relax each muscle. This exercise can provide an immediate feeling of relaxation, but it's best to practice frequently. With experience, you will become more aware of when you are experiencing tension and you will have the skills to help you relax. During this exercise, each muscle should be tensed, but not to the point of strain. If you have any injuries or pain, you can skip the affected areas. Pay special attention to the feeling of releasing tension in each muscle and the resulting feeling of relaxation. Let's begin.

Sit back or lie down in a comfortable position. Shut your eyes if you're comfortable doing so.

Begin by taking a deep breath and noticing the feeling of air filling your lungs. Hold your breath for a few seconds.

(brief pause)

Release the breath slowly and let the tension leave your body.

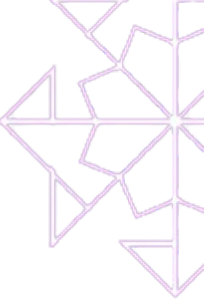
Take in another deep breath and hold it.

(brief pause)

Again, slowly release the air.

Even slower now, take another breath. Fill your lungs and hold the air.

(brief pause)



Slowly release the breath and imagine the feeling of tension leaving your body. Now, move your attention to your feet. Begin to tense your feet by curling your toes and the arch of your foot. Hold onto the tension and notice what it feels like.

(5 second pause)

Release the tension in your foot. Notice the new feeling of relaxation. Next, begin to focus on your lower leg. Tense the muscles in your calves. Hold them tightly and pay attention to the feeling of tension.

(5 second pause)

Release the tension from your lower legs. Again, notice the feeling of relaxation. Remember to continue taking deep breaths.

Next, tense the muscles of your upper leg and pelvis. You can do this by tightly squeezing your thighs together. Make sure you feel tenseness without going to the point of strain.

(5 second pause)

And release. Feel the tension leave your muscles

Begin to tense your stomach and chest. You can do this by sucking your stomach in. Squeeze harder and hold the tension. A little bit longer.

(5 second pause)

Release the tension. Allow your body to go limp. Let yourself notice the feeling of relaxation.

Continue taking deep breaths. Breathe in slowly, noticing the air fill your lungs, and hold it.

(brief pause)



Release the air slowly. Feel it leaving your lungs.

Next, tense the muscles in your back by bringing your shoulders together behind you. Hold them tightly. Tense them as hard as you can without straining and keep holding.

(5 second pause)

Release the tension from your back. Feel the tension slowly leaving your body, and the new feeling of relaxation. Notice how different your body feels when you allow it to relax.

Tense your arms all the way from your hands to your shoulders. Make a fist and squeeze all the way up your arm. Hold it.

(5 second pause)

Release the tension from your arms and shoulders. Notice the feeling of relaxation in your fingers, hands, arms, and shoulders. Notice how your arms feel limp and at ease.

Move up to your neck and your head. Tense your face and your neck by distorting the muscles around your eyes and mouth.

(5 second pause)

Release the tension. Again, notice the new feeling of relaxation.

Finally, tense your entire body. Tense your feet, legs, stomach, chest, arms, head, and neck.

Tense harder, without straining. Hold the tension.

(5 second pause)

Now release. Allow your whole body to go limp. Pay attention to the feeling of relaxation, and how different it is from the feeling of tension.

Begin to wake your body up by slowly moving your muscles. Adjust your arms and legs. Stretch your muscles and open your eyes when you're ready.

# Thank You

We hope you found this resource to be supportive and beneficial in your work with students. As you continue to apply the principles and techniques outlined in the manual, please don't hesitate to contact us should you have any questions, require further assistance, or wish to provide feedback.

You can reach us at [thrivinginaction@torontomu.ca](mailto:thrivinginaction@torontomu.ca) or visit our website at [www.torontomu.ca/thrivetmu/](http://www.torontomu.ca/thrivetmu/).

**Diana Brecher & Venus Bali**

