

Session 3 Teacher Deep Dive

Your Attention during Guided Mindfulness Practices

"The experience of meditation provides a large chunk of the raw material from which insight arises. The meditative practices also serve as a kind of container in which everything that is touched, opened, and learned can settle and be processed. And ultimately, meditation is the core of the program's self-healing power . . . Mindfulness practices create situations that invite us to be more mindful. And that's what the training is about."

-Rob Brandsma

By now, you've led multiple guided meditations with your class. You've also been assessing yourself and your students, and reflecting on criteria like your pacing, voice, and need for intervention. Likely, you've discovered areas of strength and improvement while reading meditation scripts and leading group practices.

As the class guide, your ability to manage the meditations' larger structure and smaller details will help create a fruitful practice environment. This deep dive will cover how to mindfully balance, divide, and shift your attention among several components of the class during a guided meditation.

When reading a guided meditation script, your attention is needed on more than just the words on the page. There are at least four focal points, among which you will balance and sometimes divide your attention: the group, individuals, the script, and your own meditative consciousness.

The Group

Even though students will be entering guided practices individually, and it may feel like you are suddenly working with fifteen individuals instead of a cohesive class, there will still be a group dynamic you need to stay attentive to. Physical and psychological resonance make it common for a group to grow tired, restless, calm, or agitated at the same time.

When you want to take note of the overall atmosphere of the room, in order to decide if you need to adjust the meditation in any way, try looking up and scanning the room as you read the script. Sometimes focusing on one quadrant at a time can make this a manageable task. Notice facial expressions, postures, positions, or movements. Shaking, fidgeting, swaying, shallow or heavy breathing can all be signs of agitation, in addition to tears. Changing your tone, pacing, volume, room temperature, or script length are all ways you can accommodate a group's needs.

Individuals

Sometimes individuals will experience something separate from the group—distress while the rest of the group is calm, a triggered emotion, an inability to return to grounding at the end of a meditation. You can let your instinct guide whether and how to respond to an individual need. Sometimes, it can be as simple as an extra line of encouragement you add to the script. Other times, you may need to approach an individual to supportively offer the space to change position, pause their practice, or leave the room.

The goal is not to force the group to always be on the same page. Neither is the goal to engage with every individual during every practice. It's a balance and a judgement call. A good rule of thumb to follow is that when you notice one person who is off from the rest of the group, do a quick scan to see if there might be more individuals experiencing the same thing. You should know whether you need to respond to a small group or to an individual before you act.

The Script

The words provided in each lesson script are meant as a guide. Scripts are meant to guide your presentation of a meditation, not lock you into any single way of teaching. That said, scripts are very carefully prepared in terms of language, pacing, and organization. They build on previous knowledge and bring students into new practices and information with a scaffolded approach that provides just enough support to help them feel safe while encouraging appropriate risk-taking.

If you find that a script isn't working—participants aren't as engaged, are frequently distracted, confused, or distressed—there may be several areas to examine and possibly refine. One might be sticking too closely to the script and not adapting to accommodate the present needs. Another might be not having memorized the script sufficiently. In order to lead students, the teacher must have a clear idea of where they are and where they are going. This will help you appropriately gauge discomfort, know when to offer resettling encouragement, and see places where you might pause or end the meditation with minimal disruption.

Your Meditative Consciousness

"Participants experience the meditative consciousness of the person guiding the meditation through direct transmission" (Brandsma, 78). Students will notice your meditative consciousness more than your missing a word in the script. Your embodiment of a meditation is crucial to students' feelings of safety, security, calm, and relaxation.

And yet, you cannot fully enter into a meditation with your students, as your attention will be trained on all of the above components of class. You can, however, find moments during the meditation that you can enter more fully into—a deep breath, a moment of body awareness, a release of a distracting thought. But your full attention should not slip into your experience.

One way to maintain balance while embodying the meditation is, again, to ensure you are fully familiar with the script. You'll know the arc of the meditation, the places appropriate for deeper pause, and the times when you should return your focus to scanning and assessing the room.