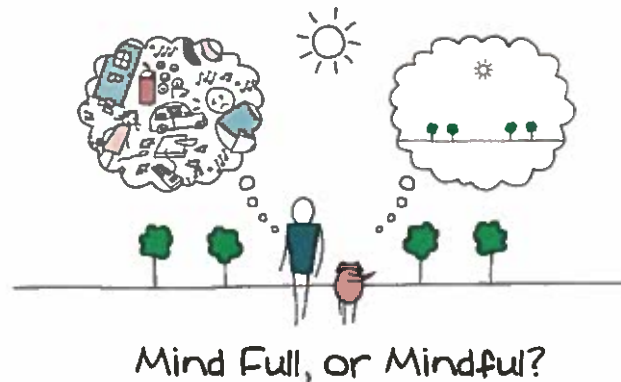


Mindfulness and Writing Studies: Exploring the Connections



“To pay attention—to observe, to see the richness and detail that is right before us—is the essence of mindfulness. It is also, I would argue, the essence of good writing. . .” Keith Kroll

“For the most part . . . no suggestion was made during our educational trajectory that maybe *awareness of thinking* could provide some kind of balance and perspective so that our thoughts didn’t rule our lives, unbeknownst to us” (Kabat-Zinn 31).

Definitions

“Mindfulness is paying attention, on purpose, non-judgmentally, in the present moment. as if your life depended on it” (Kabat-Zinn 17).

Mindfulness is “the continuous creation of new categories; openness to new information; and an implicit awareness of more than one perspective.” Langer contrasts mindfulness to “mindlessness,” which she describes as “entrapment in old categories; by automatic behavior that precludes attending to new signals; and by action that operates from a single perspective.” This focus on mindfulness does not require formal meditation practices.

—Ellen Langer

Possible Connections Between Mindfulness and Writing Studies or Classes (an incomplete list):

- Mindful practices to support writers (reduce stress, anxiety, distraction) and writing teachers.
- Awareness practices to counter thought-dominated approaches to education (inner rhetoric).
- Mindful approaches changing how argument and the teaching of writing are taught.
- Writing as a (therapeutic?) tool to help bring about awareness and mindfulness.

Questions?

- What business, if any, do awareness practices have in university writing programs?
- What training, if any, should one have if introducing awareness practices to students?
- Is mindfulness a turn away from the social and political?
- What practices can I implement in a writing classroom to help foster awareness?
- What can studies in neuroscience teach us about the value of mindful practice?
- What can I read to explore these issues more?

Mindful Practices

- Mindfully Eating an Orange (Thich Nhat Hahn)
- Mindful Breathing

- Observing Thoughts and Emotions Meditation
- Body-Awareness Meditation
- Walking Meditation (Labyrinth)
- Gratitude Meditation
- Daily Examen
- Loving Kindness Meditation

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Organizations: [The Association for Contemplative Mind in Higher Education](#) ; [Mindfulness in Education Network](#)

Orange Meditation

"If you eat an orange in forgetfulness, caught in your anxiety and sorrow, the orange is not really there. But if you bring your mind and body together to produce true presence, you can see that the orange is a miracle."¹

¹ This meditation is a lesson in mindfulness offered by Thich Nhat Hanh. It is reproduced in different forms, with different wordings, many places on the Internet. The version here is a synthesis of several sources:

When you eat an orange, try to practice concentration. Eat it in such a way that pleasure, joy, and happiness are possible the whole time. You could call this orange meditation.

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Take an orange in the palm of your hand. Look at it and breathe in such a way that it reveals itself as the miracle it is. An orange is nothing less than a miracle. It is just like you - you are also a miracle of life. You are a manifest miracle.

Hold Your Orange in your hand, toss it, and imagine other hands that may have held it.
Imagine the journey it's taken from the tiny seed that grew to become a tree, which then created this orange.
Envision the hand of the worker who picked it, and the journey to the store, then to your hand... to where you are now.

Squeeze it a bit, feel the texture. Put your nose up to it, can you smell it?
Get in for a really close look, really notice what makes this orange unique.
Scratch the surface a bit and smell again.

Peel slowly, bit by bit; you're in no rush.
As you pull away each bit, take in all that you can. Put your ear up to it as you peel, what does it sound like? Is it musical?
Peel the orange. Smell the fruit. See the orange blossoms in the orange, and the rain and the sun that have gone through the orange blossoms. The orange tree has taken several months to bring this wonder to you.
Close your eyes and taste a tiny bit of the peel, how does this experience unfold? How does it linger?

Once you've fully peeled the orange, you're ready to open it up. As you do, take in as much as you can.
As you pull a single piece away try smelling it, listening to it, looking at it closely.
Now open up that piece, take a look at all the buds inside. Taste one. Taste two. Try squeezing some juice out, how does the juice feel on your hand?

Put a bit in your mouth and get to know it. Give it a little bite. Stay focused as you continue eating.
Take a slightly larger bite and swallow. Can you follow it traveling down your esophagus?
Can you feel the moment it hits your stomach?
Can you feel your stomach at all? What's it saying?

Put a section in your mouth, close your mouth mindfully, and feel the juice coming out of the orange.

If I am 100 percent there, the orange reveals itself to me 100 percent. As I concentrate on the orange. I get deep insight from it. I can see the sun and the rain that are in it. I can see the flowers of the orange tree. I can see the little sapling sprouting, and then the fruit growing.

Its presence - its color, its texture, its smell and taste - is a real miracle, and the happiness that comes to me from getting deeply in touch with it can become very, very great.

A single orange is enough to give you a great deal of happiness when you are truly there, entirely alive, fully present, getting deeply in touch with one of the miracles of life that surrounds you.

Guided Gratitude Meditation

Let's bring your awareness to things in your life that you are thankful for.

Just give gratitude the chance to come up naturally. And when it comes up, just let yourself sink into the feeling, surrender to it. Notice how it feels in your body, how your energy feels. And if it doesn't come up that's ok, you don't need to try to make yourself feel it. Just surrender to your heart not your head.

So let's flash through all aspects of your life that you might be grateful for.

—Firstly bring your awareness to your breath, as you inhale and as you exhale and the fact that each of these breaths gives you life.

—Then, be aware of your heart beating, pulsing, filling with love and compassion and peace, and flowing that back out.

—Bring your awareness to your eyes that let you see color, faces, smiles, nature, the sunrise, the sunset, the rainbow, the moon and the stars, yourself in the mirror.

—Bring your awareness to your ears, which beam in sound, music, laughter, the voices of those you love, the silence, the beautiful sounds of life.

—Bring your awareness to your nose, which smells the ocean breeze, the aroma of sweet perfume, fresh rain, flowers, your mom's cooking, cupcakes in the oven.

—Bring your awareness to your lips and mouth, that tastes and savors and nourishes, kisses and speaks, that whispers, and sings.

—Bring your awareness to your hands that hold and touch, and caress, and open and close, and applaud, and squeeze, the arms and shoulders that carry and hug and lift and stretch.

—Our feet, our toes, the gift to wiggle them, transport you, walk, run, dangle, dance, kick, fold, leap and point.

Daily Examen (loosely adapted from the Jesuit Practice taught by St. Ignatius)

(This can be a meditative or writing exercise—I like writing.)

1. Become Aware... of your breath, body, a sense of quietness, or, if you are so inclined, God's presence.
2. Review the moments of today up until now, with a spirit of gratitude and lack of judgment.
3. Review the emotions that surface as you replay your day, focusing on the highs and lows for you.
4. Choose one emotion of the day and reflect on it, in whatever way surfaces for you (writing, prayer or meditation, etc.)
5. Look toward tomorrow with an awareness of emotions and what you need.

Loving Kindness Meditation

—Begin with a memory of receiving love and support from a specific other—parent, dog, friend. Truly feel and sit with that feeling of receiving loving kindness from another.

—Then offer loving kindness to yourself. For several minutes, repeat to yourself: May I be well; May I be happy; May I be peaceful; May I be loved.

—Then, imagine a beloved sitting before you. In your mind repeat to them: May you be well; May you be happy; May you be peaceful; May you be loved.

—Then a bit later, imagine an other toward whom you feel neutrally: an acquaintance, a shopkeeper with whom you interact. In your mind repeat to them: May you be well; May you be happy; May you be peaceful; May you be loved.

—Then a bit later, imagine an other with whom you feel some sort of conflict. In your mind repeat to them: May you be well; May you be happy; May you be peaceful; May you be loved.