

in collaboration with

# Mindfulness in courses

## WHAT IS THIS RESOURCE?

This resource provides a brief introduction to mindfulness as well as some examples of contemplative pedagogical practices that can be incorporated into courses to support student learning and wellbeing.

## HOW DO I USE IT?

Review the example strategies and considerations below when designing or revising courses to incorporate mindfulness practices that align with your course, discipline, student population or teaching style. [CET](https://cet.usc.edu/contact-us/) is available to discuss pedagogical options for integrating mindfulness practices into your course. Contact [Mindful USC](https://mindful.usc.edu/) to find mindfulness-related classes, programming and events designed to foster growth, health, wisdom, compassion, and connection within and among the diverse communities of USC.

### What is mindfulness?

The concept of mindfulness encompasses a number of different ideas relating to the ability to be contemplative, to consider one’s actions, mood or physical state, and to gain new understanding from this reflection that can improve one’s academic, professional or personal life. Research has shown that incorporating mindfulness in teaching, sometimes referred to as contemplative pedagogy, can improve learning experiences for both instructors and students by increasing self-awareness and reducing stress to deepen focus and connection.

See: Barbezat DP, Bush M. [*Contemplative Practices in Higher Education : Powerful Methods to Transform Teaching and Learning*](https://uosc.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01USC_INST/hs9vaa/alma991042442855503731). Jossey-Bass; 2014.

### Examples of mindfulness practices for teaching

Mindfulness practices help focus attention and give students a chance to practice reflective and emotional regulation skills which can help them to be more successful in academics and in life. This increased awareness can also support improved group dynamics in courses by promoting compassion for one’s self and for others. These techniques may also support student success outside of class as they can be adapted for use in professional activities and daily life - for example before a job interview, or while riding the bus.

#### Conscious breathing:

A focus on one’s breathing is a great way to foster a mind-body connection and calm the nervous system. Incorporating breathing exercises can encourage students’ conscious engagement in emotional regulation to reduce stress or increase attention. Breathing can be done proactively, or in response to stress responses which otherwise would interfere with cognitive processes and deep learning.

**Practice it:** Taking a few deep breaths to start class can help set the tone and focus attention.

#### The STOP technique:

This technique can be a useful and centering reminder to pause and reflect or engage with the current moment. Because it is brief and simple, STOP is ideal for pausing before the beginning of class, to transition between activities in a course or for injecting a calm moment into otherwise stressful experiences.

Consider asking your students to pause and take the following steps:

1. **S**top — pause for a moment.
2. **T**ake a breath — breathe deeply.
3. **O**bserve — notice the sensations in the body.
4. **P**roceed — choose how you want to proceed from this point forward.

#### The RAIN technique:

This technique is useful for finding more acceptance and self-compassion in relating to emotions. By encouraging students to pause and engage with these four steps when they experience emotions, they can learn to become more responsive and kind in the face of them.

1. **R**ecognize — label the emotion
2. **A**llow — allow without pushing it away or making it into anything else
3. **I**nvestigate — curiously explore the felt sensation of the emotion in the body
4. **N**onidentification/**N**urture — hold what arises with kindness and remember that we are not our emotions.

### Tips for implementation:

* Mindfulness practices can be implemented in a variety of course modalities including onground, online, or even asynchronously. Depending on your teaching context, identify the best way to communicate about and encourage participation in these activities.
  + For online or asynchronous activities, consider providing students with guidance in the form of written steps, audio, or video instructions.
  + Consider offering variations on chosen activities to make them accessible to all students, including those with different physical abilities.
* Consider rotating responsibilities for leading mindfulness activities throughout the semester. Instructors, TAs or students can lead these practices.
* Frame the purpose of the mindfulness intervention in your courses in the context of student learning, resilience and wellbeing.
* Be prepared to refer students to additional resources if they would like to pursue mindfulness or other related approaches outside of class. You may also wish to identify other campus resources, such as [USC Campus Support & Intervention](https://campussupport.usc.edu/students/health-and-wellness/) for students who still struggle with focus, managing stress, or emotional regulation.
* Consider collecting feedback on how these activities impact students’ learning experiences or how they could be modified to better meet students’ needs in the future.
* Improve your own mindfulness practices by employing some of these techniques in your personal or professional life, as appropriate.
* Keep informed about other mindfulness practices by staying connected to campus resources listed in the next section.

### USC mindfulness resources

* [Mindful USC](https://mindful.usc.edu/).
* [The USC Center for Mindfulness Science](https://mindfulscience.usc.edu/).

### Additional resources

* “[12 Principles of Mindful Learning](https://www.mindfulteachers.org/blog/principles-of-mindful-learning)”. Excerpted from: Yaron Weston, L. (2021). [*Mindfulness for young adults: tools to thrive in school and life*](https://uosc.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01USC_INST/hs9vaa/alma991043491743403731). Routledge.
* "[What is Emotionally Responsive Teaching](https://www.mindfulteachers.org/blog/emotionally-responsive-teaching)?" Excerpted from: Weston, L. Y. (2022). [*Teaching Resilience and Mental Health Across the Curriculum: A Guide for High School and College Teachers*](https://uosc.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01USC_INST/273cgt/cdi_askewsholts_vlebooks_9781000755596). Routledge.
* Weston, L. Y. (2020). [Mindfulness in Class and in Life: Mental health and emotional resilience alongside academic studies](https://www.aacu.org/liberaleducation/articles/mindfulness-in-class-and-in-life-mental-health-and-emotional-resilience-alongside-academic-studies). Liberal Education, 106(3), 28–. ([USC Libraries link](https://uosc.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01USC_INST/273cgt/cdi_gale_infotracmisc_A644715308)).
* Shapiro, S. L., Brown, K. W., & Astin, J. (2011). [Toward the integration of meditation into higher education: A review of research evidence](https://uosc.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01USC_INST/273cgt/cdi_proquest_journals_878145612). Teachers College Record (1970), 113(3).
* [The American Mindfulness Research Association](https://goamra.org/).
* [The Association for Contemplative Mind in Higher Education](https://acmhe.org/).

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