

Finding Center:
Strategies to Awaken Energy, Clarity, and Focus
for Peak Performance

Lesley McAllister, Baylor University

When I perform at my best, I feel _____

Centering is...

Individual

A place in the body: **the core** (supine partner exercise)

Breath awareness

Deepening the breath: Lateral stretches

Uniting breath and movement: "Helicopter pose"

Stillness and grounding: Stork pose; Balance board

Emptying the mind: meditation

Self-direction: self-talk, forming an intention, sound cues and process cues

Release of tension: Progressive relaxation, "Quick fix" PMR

Muscle scan: release jaw, release shoulders, smooth out forehead, "inner smile"

Relaxation: diaphragmatic breathing, lengthening the exhale

Forward bends and inverted postures

Energy: Warrior and standing poses; *Kapalabhati*

Moment-to-moment awareness: audiation; cueing

Holistic: "mind map;" character

Trust: overlearning=automaticity

Confidence: "Superman pose" (Amy Cuddy); Heart-opening backbends

Balance: alternate nostril breathing; midline-crossing poses

Focus: *trataka*; focal point below eye level

Internal: "Performance barrier"

Altogether, it is:

Right-brain thinking (Gallwey's "self two"): imagery

Flow (selflessness, timelessness, effortlessnes, richness)

Centering is NOT:

Analysis, Thinking in the past, Thinking in the future, Perfection, Comparison,
Trying, Effort, Judgment

Performance Journal:

- sleep, food, relationships, other daily activity
- what went well, what needed work, and what to work on for the next performance (be specific)

- Pre-Performance Routines
 - Unite breath and movement
 - Use imagery

- Character, cue image, and sound ideal
- Affirmation
- **Calming**
 - Deep breathing with gradually longer exhale with focus word (“calm”)
 - Forward bend, standing or sitting
 - Lateral stretches, standing or sitting
 - Progressive relaxation, focusing on area/s of tension, and/or muscle scan
 - *Immediately before performance:*
 - Deep breath with long exhale
 - focus word and image
- **Energizing**
 - Breathing with a gradually longer exhale, or *kapalabhati*
 - Backbend, twist, and/or Warrior poses
 - Cardio
 - *Immediately before performance:*
 - cue word, deep inhale and “attack”
- **Grounding/Focusing**
 - Breathe evenly while counting
 - “Helicopter pose” or “Superman pose”
 - Balance pose: Tree or stork pose
 - Imagery
 - *Immediately before performance:*
 - Aware of sitz bones or feet; core pulled in
 - Find a focal point
- **Balancing**
 - Alternate nostril breathing
 - Midline-crossing pose: Eagle or twisted forward bend
 - Balance pose with movement
 - Balance board
 - *Immediately before performance:*
 - Close eyes and find symmetry in the body
 - Find focal point, deep breath, and character cue

Centering... takes practice!

- Take time to center before teaching and performing
 - Have students take time to center:
 - before each lesson
 - before practice sessions
 - in studio classes
 - before taking theory exams

Contact: Lesley_sisterhen@baylor.edu