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From Heart to Hands: How Mindfulness Can Revitalize Your Teaching

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What is mindfulness?

“Mindfulness is awareness that arises through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally,¹”

- Mindfulness allows us to bring awareness to the present experience with kindness, clarity and wisdom.
- It encompasses accepting what is happening within us and around us, instead of thinking it's wrong, judging it or pushing it away.

How to meditate

- Sit in a comfortable meditation posture
- Observe your breath
- Acknowledge the thoughts that pop into your mind without engaging them
- Return to your breath as an anchor whenever you notice getting distracted

What are the benefits of mindfulness?

- Improves focus and concentration, self-regulation and emotional balance.
- Allows us to be present and practice self compassion
- Reduces intrusive thoughts and thought-rumination
- Increases self-confidence
- Improves memorization and reduces performance anxiety
- Health benefits: boosts immune system, reduces chronic pain, helps with anxiety

Incorporating Mindfulness in Piano Lessons

- Be aware of the importance of wellness in your own life
- Remember: calm breathing can influence the nervous systems of those around you; we are looking to each other for safety cues.
- Utilize breathing at the beginning of lessons, during transitions or before the end of the lesson.
- Incorporate mindfulness in the lessons in small doses.
- Help parents understand why incorporating mindfulness during lessons and while practicing at home is so important, enlist their help.

¹ Everyday Mindfulness with Jon Kabat-Zinn. <https://www.mindful.org/everyday-mindfulness-with-jon-kabat-zinn/> Accessed March 1, 2023. [mindful.org](https://www.mindful.org)

- Practice mindful movement with your students as a welcome, a warm up or a stretching exercise.
- Keep in mind: calm, slow breathing can influence the nervous systems of those around us; we look to each other for safety cues.
- Incorporate mindfulness exercises into lessons from beginning levels, keeping mindfulness practices dynamic, playful and relevant to music concepts.
- Utilize props: a calming jar, a Hoberman sphere, stuffed animals, mindful cards.

Loving-Kindness Meditation:

- Wishing well rituals help us calm down as we offer kindness to others.²
- This meditation can boost well-being and reduce stress, fostering self-acceptance and connection to others.³
- Loving Kindness Meditation Script:

1- Sit with your back aligned, feet on the floor and hands on your lap. Close your eyes or lower your gaze. You can also lie down.

2- Visualize someone dear to you and say to yourself:

***May you be safe; May you be happy; May you be healthy;
May you be free of pain and suffering; May you live with peace***

3- Visualize yourself and grant yourself the same well wishes, repeating this phrase.

4- Visualize someone neutral (a neighbor, the person who brings the mail) and repeat the phrase sending them well wishes.

5- Visualize someone you are having difficulties with and send them well wishes.

6- Visualize all beings and send all beings well wishes.

Mindfulness for Musicians: A 3-Part Approach

1. Grounding

For 1-2 minutes before playing or teaching:

a. Relax the body

Find 3 touch points: sitz bones, feet flat on floor, hands on lap.

Briefly scan the body from the top down, relaxing any areas of tension.

b. Calm the mind

Take 3 deep breaths to settle in. Take your time, breathing at your own pace.

2. Generosity

a. Speak kindly to yourself

Practice Tip: What would a friend say?

² Hunsinger, M., Livingston, R. & Isbell, L. The Impact of Loving-Kindness Meditation on Affective Learning and Cognitive Control. *Mindfulness* 4, 275–280 (2013). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-012-0125-2>

³ Elizabeth Scott. How to Practice Loving Kindness Meditation. February 2020. Accessed March 3, 2023. [verywellmind.com](https://www.verywellmind.com)

Teacher Tip: Ask students—what would a friend say?

b. Offer your gifts

Remember that your talents are gifts to be shared with the world.

Offering them to others helps us move through fear and perfectionism toward the joy of music-making.

3. Confidence

a. Welcome fear

Remember that fear is the body's way of protecting us. You can say, "Thank you, fear. I got this."

Use the "Grounding" steps above to move through fear.

b. Remember your "why" (See meditation instructions below.)

Remember Your Why: A Meditation for Musicians

Take a moment to get grounded. Find your sitz bones on your seat, your feet flat on the floor, and rest your hands gently above your knees.

Take a few deep breaths to settle in. There's no need to do anything special with the breath here. Just breathe naturally. Take your time.

Recall a powerful musical memory, one that deeply affected you and stands out in your life. This is a once in a lifetime experience, one that moves you and energizes you just to recall it. Perhaps it was a piece you heard, a teacher who encouraged you, or your deep desire to make music.

Choose a memory that you cannot imagine living without.

As you reflect, check in with the body.

How do you feel? Energized, joyful, peaceful, or any other feelings coming up?

Where in the body do you feel these?

As you are ready, gently bring your reflection into the present moment.

What do you dream of creating for yourself musically in your life now?

Allow yourself to be inspired by your memory and emboldened by your strong desire to make music.

Knowing life is impermanent, what is it that you want to offer the world musically in your time here?

As we bring the practice to a close, know that you can remember your why anytime you need to recall your deep desire to create and share music.

Whenever you are ready, take one last deep, cleansing breath, and gently let go of the practice.

For more meditations from Laura and to join her free monthly Mindful Musician Clinic, visit: <https://lauraamoriello.com/mindful-musician-clinic/>

Resources

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