
ADAPTED EXERCISE: Acceptance of Performance-Related Thoughts and Feelings

This exercise is an adaptation of the “Acceptance of Thoughts and Feelings” exercise from Eifert and Forsyth’s book (2005), and it was modified here for use with musicians. We highly recommend practicing this meditation several times a week, especially if you are performing regularly. Just as you did in the previous meditations, you’ll need to make continual adjustments to your behavior. Deal with physical discomfort or pain effectively. Accept and let go of mental distractions that are irrelevant to the task at hand, and/or label them as “task-irrelevant.”

As with the previous chapter’s meditations, go ahead and get into a comfortable seated position, with your feet flat on the floor, arms and legs uncrossed, hands resting either palms up or down in your lap, and your head, neck, and spine aligned and lifted towards the sky... .. Now, gently close your eyes...

Begin by noticing your breath the way it is, in this moment... without attempting to control it... .. Simply get in touch with its movement in your body... Notice the rising and falling of the breath in your chest, and belly... Like ocean waves coming in and out, the breath is always there... .. Focus your mind specifically on the changing pattern of sensations in your body as you breathe in... and out... in... and out... .. notice any sensations in your belly as you breathe in... and out... .. Spend a few more moments simply observing your breath

There is no need to control the breath in any way, simply allow it to be the way it is... Your breath will breathe itself as long as you let it be... and you’re not reacting to it... .. As best you can, bring an attitude of generous allowing and gentle acceptance to your breathing in this moment... There is nothing to be fixed about your breath, no particular changes need to be made to it... Simply let it be... ..

Now... think of the most recent performance you gave... .. It doesn’t matter how long ago it was... It could’ve been today or yesterday... last week or last month... or even last year or longer ago... It doesn’t matter... just think of the last time you performed in front of someone... It also doesn’t matter whether it was solo or as part of a group... and whether it was in front of a live audience... for your teacher in a private lesson... or for someone else... Any performance type is fine... Just think of it...

*Once you have it in mind... ask yourself, **“What thoughts am I having about it?”** You may immediately notice you have thoughts about how well you performed... and your mind evaluates it as either “good” or “bad,” “positive” or “negative,”... If that’s happening, it’s ok... For now, you don’t need to focus more on how it went... Just spend a few moments noticing these thoughts occurring... .. Then, ask yourself, **“What other thoughts am I having about my performance?”**... You may notice certain memories arise... Like whether you performed a certain note wrong... or maybe you were unhappy with how you performed an entire section, or an entire piece of music... and these memories may trigger more evaluations about how well you performed... .. Your mind may even wander to thinking about an upcoming performance and worrying about making similar mistakes again... so you start planning how to prevent that from happening... Or instead, you tell yourself a “story” of how you are not the performer you want to be, because of these mistakes... and you further evaluate yourself as a “bad musician” or “always unprepared” or worse, “an imposter”... .. Take a moment to notice everything occurring in your mind about your last performance... Allow ALL of these thoughts to be here... accepting even the unwanted ones... Tell yourself..., **“Let me have these thoughts about my performance... let me have them the way they are.”** After a few minutes, you may notice your mind had generated a variety of thoughts about your performance... Or maybe only a few... Like the breath, your mind will behave freely on its own, if you let it... it will evaluate*

your performance if you let it... it will worry if you let it... your mind may plan for your next performance if you let it, and it may also generate memories or even "stories" if you let it... This is what minds do... ... Yet, you are not deliberately doing these things, rather, it is your mind that behaves this way... Just like it's the breath that breathes itself, not you... ... You are not your thoughts, no matter what they may say about you... You are the one noticing your thoughts... noticing your evaluations, your worries, plans, memories, and "stories." ... Simply let your mind be, as you did with your breath... And choose to **not respond** to these performance-related thoughts... instead, hold them in your awareness and remain open to them... ..

Next, focus on any physical sensations in the body that may be coming up as you think of your performance... .. asking yourself, **"What sensations am I having about it?"** ... What do you notice? ... Are there new sensations that weren't present before? ... Or, do you notice sensations that were already present but are now more prominent? ... Or maybe you don't notice anything at all?... If so, return to your breath and focus on any sensations there ... Spend a few moments scanning your body for any sensations you have now that you thought of your performance... If you find one, notice first its location... then, say what the sensation is... like "I'm having shortness of breath... there is shortness of breath in my chest now." ... Then, notice how strong it feels and whether it's comfortable or not... and say how it is, like "It's mildly uncomfortable," or "It feels tight."... .. Stay with the feeling for a few moments to see if you can tolerate it... telling yourself, **"Let me have this feeling about my performance... let me have it the way it is."** ... Notice if it becomes more uncomfortable, if it stays the same, or if it improves... Notice also if it spreads or stays in the same spot... .. If you're focused on your breath, ask yourself, **"How is my breath now?"** Does it feel different now that you've thought of your performance, or is it the same? ... Say how it is to yourself, like "It's more shallow," or "It's the same." ... If it's more uncomfortable now, stay with the new feeling, telling yourself, **"Let this be my breath now... let me feel it the way it is."** Allow your breath to be how it is... and allow the sensation you focused on to be how it is... You are separate from these physical experiences, no matter what your mind says about them... You are the one noticing them. Simply let them be, and choose to **not respond** to these performance-related feelings... instead, hold them in your awareness and remain open to them... ..

Now..., I'd like to ask you to you bring this attitude of allowing and acceptance to all of your internal experiences Noticing any other thoughts that may arise... .. any other sensations occurring in the body... .. or other experiences... like emotions ... memories... .. urges to say or do something... sleepiness ... or anything else... Just notice the entirety of what is occurring inside you right now... .. There is nothing to be fixed or changed in this moment... Simply allow your internal experiences to be the way they are, without needing them to be different ... and if necessary, tell yourself, **"Let me have this (sensation/thought/emotion/memory/urge) now ... let me have it the way it is ..."**

And as this meditation comes to an end... gradually widen your attention to take in the sounds around you... noticing your surroundings... and slowly open your eyes with the intention to bring this awareness of thoughts and feelings, and of other internal experiences to the present moment... reminding yourself you need not respond to them, and instead, you can hold them in your awareness both now and later on today...