



Breathing Techniques Guide Sheet

Below are a couple of key ideas to keep in mind when practicing, teaching & leading breathing techniques:

1. **Practice the technique on your own** a few times to gauge its benefits. If it doesn't really work for you, keep practicing a bit. If it still doesn't, find one that does – you'll be way more excited to teach that one.
2. **Practice *teaching* the technique.** Go through your script a few times (straw breathing – included at the end of this document – is really basic so you won't have to do this very much).
3. Either help participants by counting on the exhale or guide people to go at their own space. The benefit to the latter is that it gives autonomy and challenges participants to see how slowly they can exhale.
4. **Build some background** – help participants see the reasons why this technique might be helpful. Some people respond to science – others respond to practical, relevant situations in life in which this might be helpful to use. Straw breathing, for example, is great for just bringing down emotional turmoil, decreasing mental distractions, and honing mental focus.
5. **Be encouraging** – rather than call out participants who are not participating, keep encouraging people to stay engaged. Phrases like, "remember to keep the silence" work better than "stop talking." Keep it positive, general to the class.
6. **Set some guidelines for the routine.** You might establish your own or have the participants help list some out - here are a couple of recommendations:
 - You always have the option whether or not to participate. Even just being in silence is beneficial. *However, you do not have the option to interrupt the process or disrupt others' experiences.*
 - Best to not use this time to read, be on the phone, or engage the mind in any way. It's just a time to breathe or be.
 - Give your 100% - some days you'll be more in the mood than other days.
 - Keep an open mind.
 - See if you can close the eyes. However, if you prefer not to, feel free to just keep a downward gaze, avoiding eye contact with others – this is to help keep a distraction-free environment.
7. **Debrief the experience after it's over.** The silence after breathing or mindful practice is precious – it's like eating the cake you've spent so much care to bake. Sharing can be done as a class – one at a time, in circle, or among partners. It can be through words, or just with thumbs-up, thumbs-side, or thumbs-down (or other) symbols. However, debriefing is an important way for participants to integrate the experience into their lives.



This also validates the effect of the practice, and gives others who are uncomfortable a forum to voice their concerns and for you or others to support them.

Here are some possible questions that could be asked after breathing:

- *How was that experience?*
- *What did you feel?*
- *How do you feel now compared to before?*
- *Do you have more or fewer thoughts?*
- *What is your inner-climate like now compared to before?*
- *How do you think breathing like this could be useful in life?*
- *Who do you think needs to do this?*
- *Where/when/how do you think you might want to use this? (e.g. sports event, social conflict, studying, etc.)*
- *Would you want to build this breathing into your routine?*
- *What do you think would happen to your brain and your body if you started to build this practice into your daily routine?*

8. Make it fun! Feel free to gamify this in appropriate ways. Have participants practice counting their exhale to see if they are able to elongate them day after day or week after week. Challenge the class to see how long they can keep silence after the breathing is complete.

9. Encourage leadership. Once others become proficient, some might want to lead – this is could be beneficial in democratizing the experience and also and frees you up to support or engage as a participant.



Straw Breathing

Benefits: Reduces blood pressure, lung function, parasympathetic tone, and improves sense of calm, focus, and energy.

Demo [Video](#)

Instructions: Inhale deeply through the nose - exhale slowly through an imaginary coffee straw held between the lips. The exhale should be as slow as possible for each person. 6 breaths per minute is great. This can be repeated 4-5 times, gently guiding participants to continue the round when they finish. This technique should be followed by a period of silence of regular breathing (start with a few seconds of quiet, and perhaps build to a couple minutes over the course of a month). Neuroscience studies show that when we slow down exhale and we breathe at about 6 breaths per minute, we settle down the fight-flight response and create maximum levels of relaxation – engaging our parasympathetic nervous system (rest-and-digest state) (e.g., Bernardi et al., 2001; Gard et al., 2014).



References

- Bernardi, L., Porta, C., Gabutti, A., Spicuzza, L., & Sleight, P. (2001). Modulatory effects of respiration. *Autonomic Neuroscience*, 90(1-2), 47-56.
- Gard, T., Noggle, J. J., Park, C. L., Vago, D. R., & Wilson, A. (2014). Potential self-regulatory mechanisms of yoga for psychological health. *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 8(770), 1-20.



4-7-8 Breathing

Benefits: This technique is excellent for promoting relaxation, reducing stress, and improving sleep. It activates the parasympathetic nervous system, helping to calm the body and mind. It's often referred to as a "natural tranquilizer" for the nervous system.

Instructions:

1. Sit in a comfortable position with your back straight. You can also lie down if preferred.
2. Place the tip of your tongue against the ridge of tissue just behind your upper front teeth and keep it there throughout the practice.
3. Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whooshing sound.
4. Close your mouth and inhale quietly through your nose for a count of 4.
5. Hold your breath for a count of 7.
6. Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whooshing sound, for a count of 8.
7. This completes one cycle. Repeat the cycle for a total of four breaths.

Tips for Practice:

- Ensure that the exhale is longer than the inhale to engage the relaxation response.
- If holding the breath for 7 counts feels difficult, try reducing the counts proportionally (e.g., 2-3.5-4).
- Gradually build up to longer sessions over time.

When to Use:

- To unwind before bedtime for improved sleep.
- During moments of anxiety or stress to regain calm and focus.
- Before challenging tasks or conversations to ground yourself.



Ujjayi Breathing

Demo [Video](#)

Benefits: Ujjayi stimulates the vagus nerve, responsible for activating the fight or flight response, calming the system down. Heart rate variability improves, and the parasympathetic nervous system is able to again be in control of reactions and responses to stimuli. Excellent breath for emotional regulation and body relaxation. Helpful for focus, calm, and insomnia.

*HRV is a widely accepted index for physiological resilience. As we age, HRV declines in quality, and elite athletes often have the best HRV. When we experience chronic stress, our HRV is a reflection of this. We can use techniques to influence our HRV to improve our resilience levels (biofeedback).

Instructions:

1. Breathe in and out through their mouths like a huge sigh, like fogging a mirror.
2. Notice how the breath feels a bit cold at the top part of their mouths, palates, or throats.
3. Close mouth and breathe with the same sighing feeling, imagining they were breathing from the cold spot in throat, instead of from nose.
4. When the ujjayi breathing is done correctly, it should sound like the waves of the ocean, a light snoring, or "Darth Vader," on both the inhale and the exhale, a deep, guttural whisper that is between a soft sniff and a harsh pushing of air.
5. Close eyes and continue breathing with ujjayi on and off for a few moments as they learn to "turn it on and off" with their throats, paying attention to the difference between ujjayi and normal breathing. After a minute or more, return to normal breathing and open their eyes gently.



Bhastrika (Bellow's breath AKA Power Breathing)

Bellow's breath is used to improve digestive and respiratory health by increasing the level of oxygen in the body. The effect of this breathing technique, when it is practiced regularly, is to provide a level of calm energy, a helpful state for the integration of flow into work, play, and life activities.

Practice Instructions

1. Start by finding a comfortable position where back is straight but shoulders are relaxed
2. Close the eyes if you are comfortable doing so. Otherwise, looking down is fine.
3. Get into the "starting position": hands in loose fists by the shoulders, elbows by the side of the ribcage.
4. Take a transition breath in and out before starting
5. All together:
 - a. a. As you breathe in through the nose, shoot the hands up towards the sky, opening them fully.
 - b. b. As you exhale, hands fall back to starting position.
6. After about 15-20 repetitions, say "and relax" and hands can rest on the lap, with palms either facing up or down.
7. Rest for 10-20 seconds in silence, noticing any sensations in the body or mind.
8. Repeat steps 5-8 twice more.
9. Open the eyes.

Further reading:

Bhavanani AB, Madanmohan, Udupa K. Acute effect of Mukh bhastrika (a yogic bellows type breathing) on reaction time. *Indian J Physiol Pharmacol.* 2003 Jul;47(3):297-300. PMID: 14723315.

Veerabhadrapppa, S. G., Herur, A., Patil, S., Ankad, R. B., Chinagudi, S., Baljoshi, V. S., & Khanapure, S. (2011). Effect of yogic bellows on cardiovascular autonomic reactivity. *Journal of cardiovascular disease research*, 2(4), 223-227.



Alternate Nostril Breathing:

Benefits: *Practicing this breath increases the level of calm in the body and helps individuals enter a state of relaxation or meditation more easily. It can be used to regularly manage stress before or while it arises.*

Practice Instructions (healthline)

1. Sit in a comfortable position with legs crossed.
2. Place left hand on left knee.
3. Lift right hand up toward nose.
4. Exhale completely and then use right thumb to close right nostril.
5. Inhale through left nostril and then close left nostril with your fingers.
6. Open right nostril and exhale through this side.
7. Inhale through right nostril and then close this nostril.
8. Open left nostril and exhale through left side.
9. This is one cycle.
10. Continue for up to 5 minutes.
11. Always complete the practice by finishing with an exhale on the left side.

Further reading:

Naik GS, Gaur GS, Pal GK. Effect of Modified Slow Breathing Exercise on Perceived Stress and Basal Cardiovascular Parameters. *Int J Yoga*. 2018 Jan-Apr;11(1):53-58. doi: 10.4103/ijoy.IJOY_41_16. PMID: 29343931; PMCID: PMC5769199.

Jayawardena R, Ranasinghe P, Ranawaka H, Gamage N, Dissanayake D, Misra A. Exploring the Therapeutic Benefits of Pranayama (Yogic Breathing): A Systematic Review. *Int J Yoga*. 2020 May-Aug;13(2):99-110. doi: 10.4103/ijoy.IJOY_37_19. Epub 2020 May 1. PMID: 32669763; PMCID: PMC7336946.



Resources:

[Breath: The New Science of a Lost Art by James Nestor](#)

[James Nestor and Joe Rogan discuss the problems with Mouth Breathing](#)

[3 Great Breathing Techniques](#)

[Sky Schools \(breathwork and SEL training for schools\)](#)

[The Art of Living Course](#)

[Wim Hoff Method](#)