

Initial Meditation Instructions

Posture

1. Sit in such a way that you can be reasonably comfortable with your back straight for the duration of the sit, whether you sit in a chair or on a cushion on the floor. If you choose the latter, you may want to experiment with different cushion configurations and/or meditation benches so that your knees, sit bones, and back will be properly supported and as comfortable as possible. When using cushions, many people find it helpful to have their knees positioned lower than their hips. *Note: Sitting like a yogi in full lotus is not at all necessary for meditation!*
2. Get your back, neck, and head in alignment, front-to-back and side-to-side.
3. Your eyes can be open or closed, though closed eyes are recommended at first.

Relax

1. While maintaining a straight back, relax your shoulders, jaw, abdomen, face, and/or anywhere else that you tend to hold tension. Scan your body to see if you can find any other tension that you can release.
2. As much as possible, relax your mind. Take some moments to appreciate the fact that you're gifting yourself the upcoming time away from all the usual tasks and worries of your life. Tasks and worries will almost certainly still arise in your mind, but these next moments are meant to be a time when you need not engage with those thoughts.

Intention and Breath

1. Set a timer for your intended meditation session length. *Insight Timer* is an excellent free app for iOS and Android devices.
2. Resolve to practice diligently for the entire session, regardless of how it goes.
3. Breathe through your nose as naturally as possible without trying to control your breath.
4. Turn your attention to the sensations associated with breathing around your nostrils and upper lip. Another option is to center your attention on the sensations associated with breathing in the abdomen. See which of these is the easiest for you to focus on and then stick with that one, at least for the sit at hand. The set of sensations that you choose will be your meditation object.
5. Rather than focusing on these breathing sensations by excluding any others, allow your attention to stay centered on your meditation object while your peripheral awareness remains relaxed and open to anything that arises within it (e.g. sounds in the environment, physical sensations in the body, etc.)
5. Try to keep your attention centered on the sensations of breathing at the nose or abdomen for as long as possible.
6. *Inevitably*, your mind will get distracted and drift away from your intended meditation object. As soon as you recognize that this has happened, take a moment to appreciate the fact that you have remembered your intention to meditate, and give your mind an imaginary "pat on the back." Though you may have a tendency to

judge yourself and feel disappointed for having lost your focus, doing so is counterproductive. Mind wandering is natural, and the important act in this case is not the losing of focus but rather the remembering and returning to your focus. Thus, do your best to reward the mind for remembering its object and positively reinforce such behavior.

7. Having done so, gently re-center your attention on the meditation object.
8. Repeat step 4 until your timer sounds!

Length of sit and practicing regularly

- You can get relaxation benefits from any length of sit. Aim for at least 20 minutes.
- If you wish to obtain the supra-mundane benefits that a diligent meditation practice offers, you will want to sit for 45–60 minutes per day, ideally in one sitting.
 - For many beginners this can feel like an extremely long time. That’s okay—just do the best you can! Start small and keep increasing the length of your meditation sessions, as you are able. If you feel like you need to readjust your position, open your eyes, or pause, that is perfectly fine: just do so as mindfully and quietly as possible.
- You will get the most benefits from your meditation practice if you diligently sit every day. Try to sit at the same time every day so that it is easier to create a routine.

About this handout and practice

This handout reflects the initial instructions in an authentic description of “The Practice of Tranquility and Insight,” also known as Samatha and Vipassanā. It was adapted from a handout written by Upasaka Culadasa (John Yates, PhD.), a neuroscientist and meditation master with over four decades of experience in the Tibetan and Theravadin Buddhist traditions.

Culadasa’s book, *The Mind Illuminated*, is a complete meditation guide integrating Buddhist wisdom and neuroscience. You can find it at Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and at many independent booksellers. It is available in several formats, including paperback, Kindle, MP3 CD, and Audible. Although the book draws on Buddhist meditation practices and philosophy, it is non-religious and non-sectarian in nature, does not prescribe any conversion of faith, and is universally useful to those of any—or no—faith.

In addition, there are dozens of teachers-in-training who are authorized to teach in Culadasa’s tradition who can be found at <https://dharma-treasure.org/teachers-in-training/>. There is also a robust community of over two thousand students and teachers on Reddit at <https://www.reddit.com/r/TheMindIlluminated/>. Lastly, there is also a smaller but officially sanctioned community at <http://dharma-treasurecommunity.org>.

Prepared with love by Chris Gagné (Upasaka Nandaka, <http://chrisgagne.com>) for the benefit of all who read it. Please feel free to share this with others who may also benefit.