

Learning Mindfulness through Several Meditation Exercises

EXERCISE: Meditation #1 — Scanning a Picture Frame with Your Eyes Open

One easy way to start building mindfulness skills is with an eyes-open, beginner's meditation that involves scanning the perimeter of a picture frame slowly with your eyes open, or of a window or door frame, while seated upright in front of it. First, you want to sit in a straight-back chair, approximately three to five feet away from where the frame is attached to the wall. Make sure the picture frame is securely attached to the wall, or is propped upright against a larger object, so it doesn't fall during your meditation. Sit with your feet flat on the floor, arms and legs uncrossed, hands resting in your lap with palms either facing up or down, and make sure your head, neck, and spine are all aligned and lifted up towards the sky, as if a helium balloon were pulling your head upward. Meditation is about "falling awake" and becoming more alert, rather than becoming mentally dulled or falling asleep. You'll want to sit wakefully, in a position that makes falling asleep nearly impossible.

Be sure to choose a picture frame that is ornate or has some detail to it (see Figures 4-6). Wooden picture frames are ideal, because they often have different patterns of color and texture along the length of the frame. Don't choose a picture frame that is too plain or uniform in its color and texture, because it won't hold your attention for several minutes at a time.

Now, draw your attention towards the top left corner of the frame... Begin slowly and deliberately tracing the outer perimeter of the frame with your eyes... moving from the top left corner across the top of the frame towards the top right corner... then down to the lower right corner... across the bottom of the frame towards the lower left corner... then returning up towards the top left corner where you started. Repeat this process continuously... .. Keep scanning the picture frame slowly... and deliberately... in a clockwise direction, for three minutes at a time... Whenever you get distracted internally with thoughts, memories, sensations, or other experiences... just let go of the distraction and bring your attention back to scanning the perimeter of the picture frame... Also, whenever you get distracted externally by sounds, sights, or other sensory experiences, let go of those too... and bring your mind back to scanning the frame... It takes effort to keep bringing your mind back to the task, so don't judge yourself if you get overly distracted at first... .. That's why you should rest briefly after three minutes of scanning...

Rest for one minute after scanning, then return to scanning the frame again for another three minutes. Do this repeatedly for 15 minutes total, alternating between scanning, resting, scanning, and so on.

Eventually, you will want to scan for longer than three minutes, in order to increase your ability to sustain mindful attention. Three minute intervals are great for beginning meditators, but eventually you may get bored and may want to increase them. After one week of scanning at intervals of three minutes, try increasing to five minute intervals, followed by one minute of rest. Here, you'll also want to lengthen your total mediation time to 20-25 minutes, so you're getting more out of it. You can even challenge yourself to scan for 10 minute intervals at a time. The longer you can sustain your attention on this task, the more mindful you will become.

Just as a filmmaker makes continual adjustments to the camera lens in order to stay focused during the whole movie, you too will have to make continual adjustments to your behavior in order to stay mindful of the whole task. Obviously, if you are physically uncomfortable doing the task, please make necessary changes to your seated position, or posture. If you're in pain, you may want to stop meditating and treat the pain until you are able to return to this task. Regarding any difficulty in getting distracted by thoughts, you can label your thoughts as either "task-relevant" or "task-irrelevant" in order to accept their occurrence and keep attention focused on what you're doing. Try doing this if you're unable to simply let

Key Idea:

In order to keep your attention focused throughout the meditation, label your thoughts as either “task-relevant” or “task-irrelevant.”

go of them. Here, “task-relevant” means any thought(s) related to the picture frame (its color, texture, shape, lighting and shadowing effects, etc.), or any thought(s) related to the act of scanning the picture frame (how fast/slow you are scanning, how sometimes you may get stuck at one spot, or if you skip over one spot, whether the task is boring/enjoyable, etc.). Here, “task-irrelevant” means thoughts about *anything else*. Meditation is the art of singularly focusing all your attention on one object or one task. You'll know you're getting better at staying mindful when you have more relevant thoughts than irrelevant ones during this task. If you're having more irrelevant thoughts, don't worry, you can always re-engage with the task somehow so your thoughts *become* more task-

relevant. For example, if you notice your thoughts are mainly irrelevant after the first three minutes, adjust your behavior by scanning in the opposite direction instead (counter clockwise) for the next three minutes... Then check to see if your thoughts become more task-irrelevant. If not, try going faster, or focusing only on one side of the picture frame, or synching the speed of your scanning along with the ticking of a clock in the room, or counting along with your scanning, saying a number after reaching each corner of the picture frame... There are so many ways to engage further with this meditation, and you'll discover them by making continual adjustments to your behavior in real time. As long as you're engaging more fully in the task, your thoughts will become task-relevant! Can you think of any other adjustments you can make to stay with the task?

Make sure you choose a frame that isn't too small so you'll have to squint your eyes when viewing it, or too large that you'll need to move your head from side to side when doing this meditation. Your head should not move during this task, only your eyes. Ideally, choose a medium sized frame, e.g., somewhere between 8" by 10" and 24" by 36." You also don't want to strain your eyes when doing this meditation. Make sure you're not seated too far from the frame.

Here are some examples of frames that are detailed enough to hold your attention:



Figure 4. A detailed wooden frame (Source: <https://pxhere.com/en/photo/648777>).

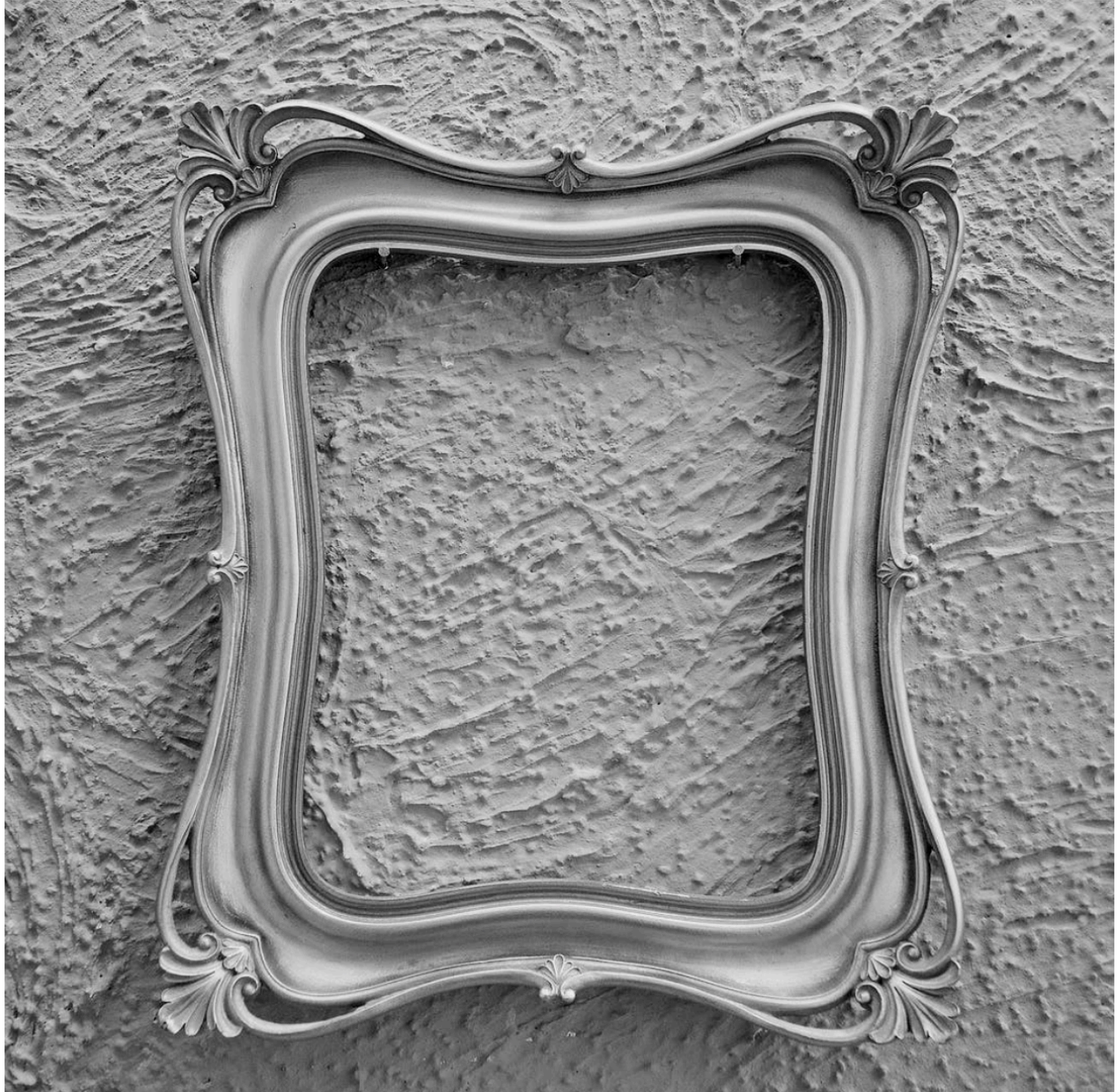


Figure 5. An ornately made frame (Source: *White switch plate* by Garnica, 2018).

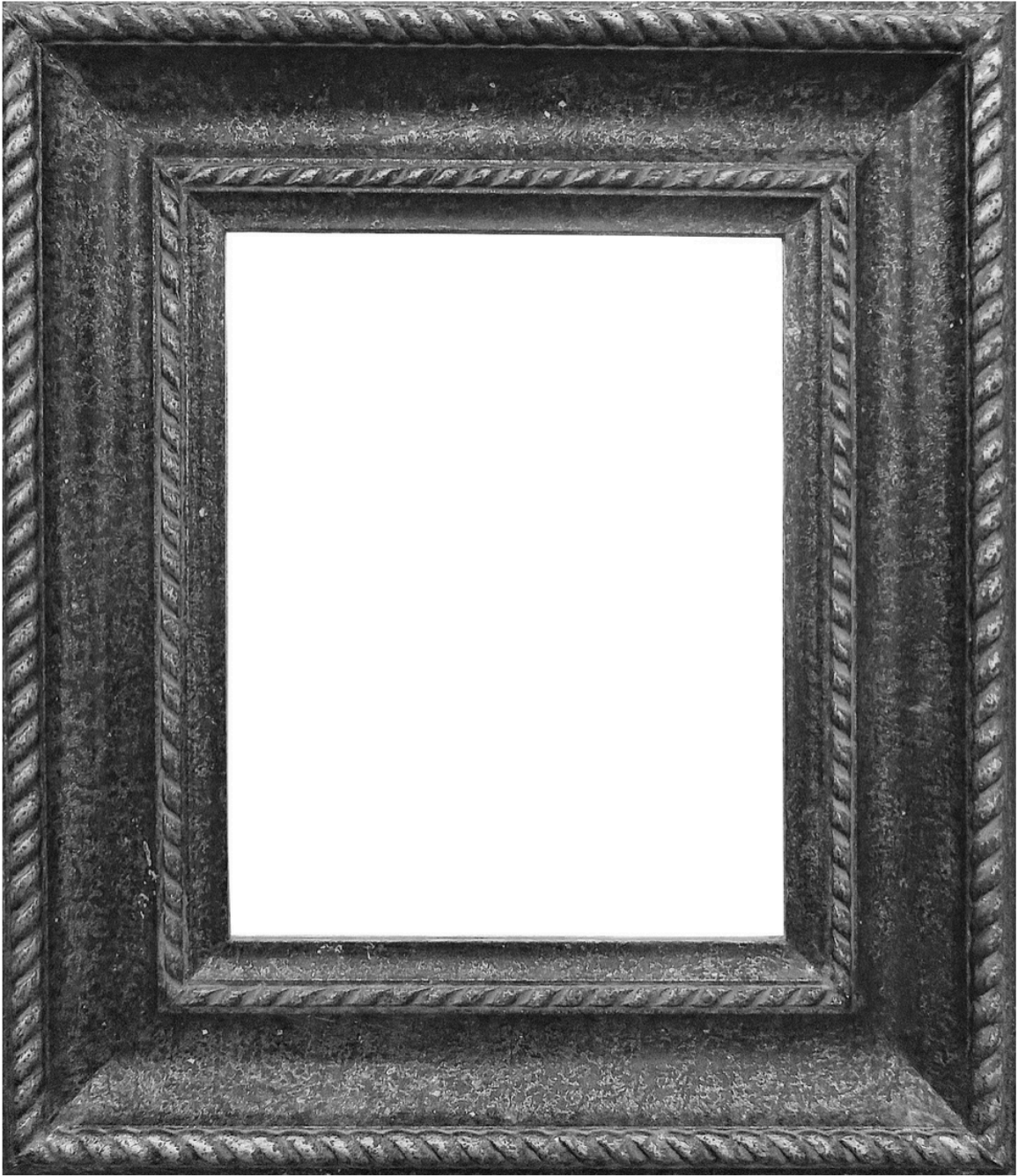


Figure 6. A detailed frame with coils along perimeter (Source: *Antique picture frame* by Eckert, 2018).

In addition to visually scanning a door frame, you can also do this meditation with a window frame in your home or office, a door frame, or even floorboards if you're seated on a wooden floor. In actuality, you can do this exercise with any object that has a clear perimeter for you to scan, as long as the perimeter is detailed enough or ornate. When scanning floorboards, there isn't always a clear perimeter to follow along with. However, you can easily create a scanning pattern that will keep you engaged for three minutes at a time. Using the floorboards in Figure 7, you can start scanning at the top of the board that is furthest to the left, then scan in a downward direction with your eyes focused in the center of the floorboard..., doing the same with the smaller board below it. Then once you've reached the bottom of the board, move to the adjacent board on the right, but scan in an upward manner on this board until you end at the top. Make sure you're seated so you can comfortably tilt your head downwards for several minutes at a time - try sitting on the floor, crosslegged.

Repeat this process of alternating between scanning upwards for one board, downwards for the next board, then back upwards for the next one, and so on... Just like with the previous meditations, you can stop after three minutes, rest for one minute, then continue scanning for another three minutes, and alternate between scanning and resting until 15 minutes is up.

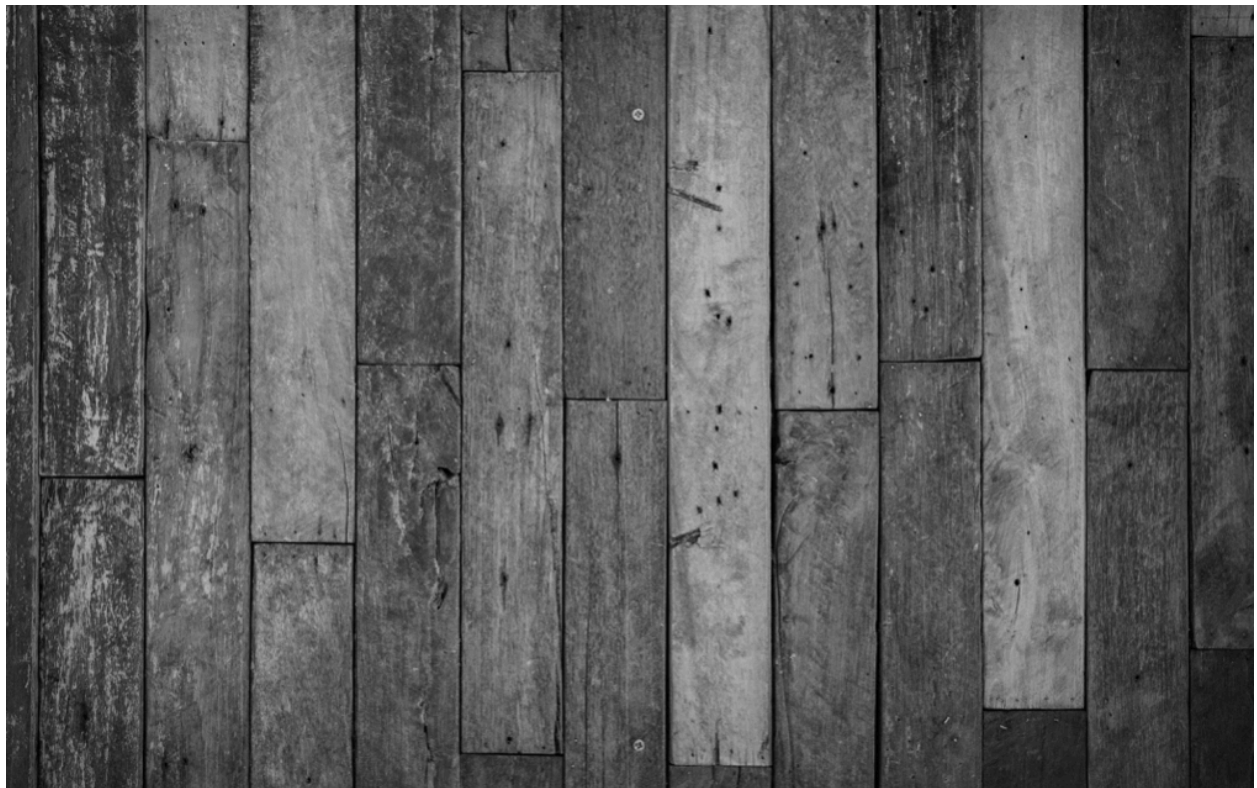


Figure 7. Detailed floorboards (Source: *Brown wooden floor* by FWStudio, 2016).

Meditation #1 Summary:

- 1) After sitting wakefully in your chair, direct your eyesight to the top left corner of the picture frame. Then, scan across the top of the frame slowly and deliberately, until you reach the top right corner, then down to the bottom right corner, across to the bottom left corner, and returning to the top left corner. Keep scanning in a clockwise direction for three minutes at a time.
- 2) After three minutes, rest for one minute, then return to scanning the picture frame again.
- 3) Continue to alternate between three minutes of scanning and one minute of resting until 15 minutes is up.

*In order to stay focused on scanning the frame, you'll need to make continual adjustments to your behavior during the task. Deal with physical discomfort or pain effectively. Accept and let go of mental distractions that are irrelevant to the task, and/or label them as "task-irrelevant." Here, "task-relevant" means any thought(s) related to the picture frame or to the act of scanning the frame. "Task-irrelevant" means a thought(s) about anything else. Make sure you choose a frame that is detailed or ornate.

EXERCISE: Meditation #2 — Mindfulness of the Breath

This exercise is a common beginner's meditation, though it's typically performed with the eyes closed and is somewhat more structured. We believe some beginners do well with eyes-closed meditations, and/or with more structured meditations, whereas others may struggle to remain alert during eyes-closed meditations, and/or they may not have the mental energy for a more structured one. For these reasons, we taught you the previous, eyes-open meditation first. However, please experiment with each meditation in this chapter to determine which one works best for you.

For this meditation, we recommend you create a mental check-list of the components of the breath to focus on throughout it. The **bold** words in the paragraphs below can serve as bullet points in your check-list. This meditation works best when you structure your check-list and deliberately focus on each component of the breath. In total, it should take about 10-15 minutes. We recommend you record this script at a slow talking speed, and then use the playback as an audioguide for the meditation.

*You can begin this meditation by getting into a comfortable seated position, with wakeful posture again, and then close your eyes... Begin by just noticing your breath the way it is, without attempting to control it... Spend about one minute just observing how you are breathing... notice first the **location** of your **in-breath**... where does the breath come into your body... and the **location** of your **out-breath**... where does it leave your body?... Is it coming in through the nose and out through the mouth?... Or is it coming in and out from the same place... Simply observe the location of each inhalation and exhalation... and after about one minute tell yourself - what do you notice? Try and answer these questions simply with few words.*

*Then, resume observing the breath again for about two minutes..., while continuously making note of how your breath **feels** in your body... Do you notice you feel the air entering into and leaving your lungs?... Can you feel the breath expanding your rib cage?... Or, does the breath come to rest higher up in the shoulder area or the upper chest?... Do you **feel** it in those areas?... Do you feel any tension or pain in your chest?... If so, try to relax your chest and drop your breath down into your abdomen... Also, do you notice the air **feels** cooler during the inhalation and warmer during the exhalation?... Spend another minute or two just noticing how/ where your breath **is felt** in your body... Then, try and answer these questions simply with few words.*

*Next, spend about three more minutes noticing the **quality** of your breath... Don't try to control the breath's pattern, just spend the time noticing it and seeing what you discover.... How do you describe the **quality** of it, e.g., is it smooth or rough?... Is it shallow or deep?... Is it labored or relaxed?... Is it obstructed because your nose is clogged up, or because you're wheezing?... Keep investigating to see what you notice... Then, try and answer these questions simply with few words.*

*Lastly, you can spend the final three or four minutes noticing the **rests in between breaths**... Notice how long those **rests** are... You can count how many seconds each **rest** is... Then, ask yourself, are the **rests** after the in-breath the same length as those after the out-breath?... Or are the **rests** shorter after the in-breath and longer after the out-breath?... Do the **rests** increase at all?... Or do they stay the same length?... Try and answer these questions simply with few words.*

Finally, when you feel ready, take a long, deep breath and gently open your eyes.

Please note, in order to stay focused with the task, you will need to make continual adjustments to your behavior in real time. Obviously, if you're physically uncomfortable doing the task, please make necessary changes to your seating position, or posture. If you're in pain, you may want to stop meditating and treat the pain until you're able to come back to this task. While doing this meditation, you'll also want to notice any mental evaluations and let go of them. For example, you may have some judgments about your breathing, like how you're not breathing "properly," or that your breathing is "too shallow," or it is "too this or too that." Please accept that these thoughts are occurring, let them go, and return to noticing the components of your breath - **location, how/where it is felt, its quality, its rests**. If you can't let go of them easily, you can label them as either "task-relevant" or "task-irrelevant" like you did with the previous meditation. Here, "task-relevant" means any thought(s) related to your breath's **location, how/where it is felt, its quality, and its rests**. "Task-irrelevant" means a thought(s) about anything else. After accepting them and letting go of irrelevant thoughts, bring your mind back to noticing your breath. Whenever your mind gets pulled into any internal or external distractions, simply let them go, or label them as irrelevant, and bring yourself back to noticing your breath. You'll know you're doing this right if your thoughts become task-relevant after you've made proper adjustments to your behavior to remain focused on what you are doing.

Can you think of any other adjustments to be made?

Meditation #2 Summary:

- 1) After sitting wakefully in your chair, first spend one minute finding the **location** of your in-breath & out-breath.
- 2) Next, spend two minutes noticing & describing **how the breath feels** in the body, and **where it is felt**, using simple words.
- 3) Then, spend three minutes noticing & describing the **quality** of the breath, using simple words.
- 4) Lastly, spend three or four minutes noticing & describing the **rests in between breaths**, using simple words.

*In order to stay focused on your breath, you will need to make continual adjustments to your behavior during the task. Deal with physical discomfort or pain effectively. Accept and let go of mental distractions that are irrelevant to the breath, and/or label them as "task-irrelevant." Here, "task-relevant" means any thought(s) related to the breath's location, how/where it is felt, its quality, and its rests. "Task-irrelevant" means a thought(s) about anything else.

EXERCISE: Meditation #3 — Mindfulness of the Body

This is another beginner's meditation typically performed with the eyes closed, while lying down on top of a yoga mat or blanket, or on your bed. This meditation is also structured, because it guides your attention through various parts of the body in an orderly way. It will certainly help you detect if you're carrying tension in any part(s) of your body, which is good for musicians/performers who need their body to be relaxed during performances. However, it may not be helpful for those with physical conditions made worse by lying down. It may cause sleepiness, so we recommend momentarily opening one's eyes and taking a deep breath whenever one is sleepy. Then, return to the body scan. If you remain sleepy, try focusing on one area of the body only, then end the body scan. Alternatively, one can sit upright in a chair instead of lying down.

We also recommend you record this script at a slow talking speed, and then use the playback as an audioguide for this meditation. The total time needed is about 20-25 minutes. Like with the Breath Meditation, we recommend creating a mental check-list of the components of the body scan to focus on throughout it. The **bold** words in the paragraphs below can serve as bullet points in your check-list.

Begin, by finding a comfortable position on your floor or bed.... If you need a pillow to support your head, please use it. Let your hands and arms gently rest at your side. Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths... breathing in fully through your nose and out through your mouth or nose... Notice the rising and falling of your stomach with each in-breath and out-breath. Keep breathing in fully and out slowly for a few moments... ..

When ready, bring your attention to your feet... observing any sensations in your left foot, and in your right foot... and any sensations in the toes on your left foot and right foot... Wiggle your toes on both feet for a few moments.... Notice how it feels to move your toes against your socks or shoes, or against your other toes if your feet are bare.... Notice the sensations in your toes and along your feet as you continue to wiggle your toes... Now stop... Was your attention directed more towards your left foot or your right foot?... What sensations do you notice now you've stopped wiggling your toes?... Notice also if there's an absence of sensations now... and where it occurs... .. and if any distractions arise inside of you, or externally, accepting and letting go of them... re-directing your focus back to the sensations in your feet... Just notice whatever sensations arise and keep focusing on them

*Now, shift your attention towards your left and right leg... noticing any sensations there too... spend a few moments scanning your legs completely for sensations, starting with the left ankle, calf, knee, and ending with the thigh... then moving over to the right ankle, calf, knee, and ending with the right thigh... Scan for any sensations you find along the way... When you find one, notice its **location**... notice **what the sensation is**... and **how strong or weak** it feels... notice if it's **pleasant, unpleasant or neutral**... Notice if it **passes** or if it **stays** in your awareness... notice also if it **stays in one spot or shifts from one spot to another**... Just allow the sensation or sensations to be, without judgment... Notice also any absence of sensation... and where that occurs... and if there are any distractions in this moment... remember to accept them and let them go, while re-directing your attention back to your legs, noticing whatever sensations are there... ..*

*Then, shift your attention to your pelvis area and lower back... noticing any sensations there... Spend a few moments looking for sensations there... starting with the pelvis and groin in front, then moving to the lower back area... .. When you notice a sensation, notice its **location** and **what it is**... **How strong or weak** is it?... Is it **pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral**?... Does it **stay** or does it **pass**?... Notice also, is there any pain or discomfort in your lower back?... If so, don't judge yourself... Try to focus all of your attention onto the pain...*

noticing where it's located, how intense it is... asking yourself does it stay or go away, does it get worse or better?... If it does stay, can you allow it to be there without trying to push it away?... If you're struggling to accept it, that's ok, just try and stay with it for a few more moments... .. noticing whatever you can about it... ..

Next, shift your attention to your chest and belly... place one hand on your chest and one on your belly... then take a few breaths in and out... notice if the breath is felt more in the chest or in the belly... if it's more in your chest, that's ok, can you drop your breath down into the belly?... What does it feel like to breathe more fully into your belly?... Take a few moments to notice the difference... .. Now, scan your chest and belly for any sensations of tension... If you detect any tension, notice its **location**, **how strong** or **weak** it is... notice also if you have an urge to move away from it... If so, can you resist that urge and just notice the tension?... If not, that's ok... don't judge yourself... just keep trying to stay with the tension, breathing deeply into it... then focus your attention onto the exact location of it... staying with it for a few more moments, and allowing the tension to be...breathing in and out with it there... Noticing if it **stays** or **passes**, and if it **spreads** to other areas or **not**... .. Let go of distractions also, and keep your focus on your chest and belly... noticing whatever sensations, or tension, there are to be noticed in those areas... ..

When you're ready... shift your attention now to your hands and arms... noticing any sensations there... spend a few moments scanning your left arm, starting with the left hand, wrist, forearm, and upper arm... then moving over to the right arm, spending a few moments scanning your right hand, wrist, forearm, and upper arm... looking for any sensations along the way... When you detect a sensation, again, notice its **location**... notice **what the sensation is**... **How strong** or **weak** is it?... Is it **pleasant**, **unpleasant**, or **neutral**?... Does it **pass** or does it **stay**?... Does it **move around to another spot** or **not**?... Notice also any absence of sensation... If so, do you feel the floor or bed underneath your hands and arms?... Do you notice how your clothing feels against your wrists and arms?... See if you can feel the weight of your arms against the floor, and the weight of your clothing on your arms... .. Remember, if there are any distractions, let them go... while re-focusing on the sensations in your arms and hands... ..

And now, shift your attention to your head, neck, and face... noticing any sensations there... Spend a few moments scanning the top of your head, the back of the head... the sides around your ears... then move onto your forehead, eyes, nose, lips, cheeks, and your chin... See if you notice any sensations along the way... When you detect one, notice its **location**... and **what it is**... **How strong** or **weak** is it?... Is it **pleasant**, **unpleasant**, or **neutral**?... Does it **pass** or **stay**?... If you don't find any sensations there, move down to your neck, shoulder, and upper back area... Do you feel any tension there?... .. If so, where is its **location**?... **How strong** or **weak** is it?... Can you stay with it?... If not, that's ok, can you try to breathe into it and stay with it for just a few moments?... .. Noticing whatever you can about it... .. While letting go of distractions... ..

Now, expand your attention to include your whole body... Freely scan the entire body for any sensations you didn't notice before... If you find one..., notice its location and other qualities that jump out at you... .. Asking yourself the same questions as before... .. Pay attention also to how your breath is flowing freely through your entire body... .. Expand your awareness to include your breath and all the sensations you noticed during this meditation... ..

Then, when you're ready, gently open your eyes... and return your attention to being awake in the present moment, here in this room... .. Take another deep breath in... and out... and make the intention to carry this expanded awareness with you for the rest of your day...

Meditation #3 Summary:

- 1) After lying down in a comfortable position, take a few deep breaths and notice the breath rise and fall in your stomach.
- 2) Then, systemically scan the following areas on your body for any sensations, in order: your feet and toes, legs, pelvis & lower back, chest & belly, hands & arms, head, face, neck, shoulders, & upper back. When you find a **sensation**, notice its **location**, **what it is**, **its strength**, **its pleasantness**, **its duration**, and if it **spreads** or **stays** in one spot.
- 3) Spend about three minutes scanning each area of the body.
- 4) If you encounter tension or pain, try to keep your attention on it, while observing it systematically, as you did with other sensations, as in #2 above. Notice if it worsens or stays the same.
- 5) End the meditation with an expanded awareness of your breath & all the sensations you noticed, and carry that awareness with you.

*In order to stay focused on each area of the body, you will need to make continual adjustments to your behavior during the task. Deal with physical discomfort or pain effectively. Accept and let go of mental distractions that are irrelevant to scanning each area of the body, and/or label them as “task-irrelevant.” Here, “task-relevant” means any thought(s) related to the sensations you notice, or to the areas of the body you are scanning. “Task-irrelevant” means a thought(s) about anything else.

Below, please write down your most common ways of coping with anxiety and other emotional discomfort, either during performances or not, using the categories provided. Here, “attempts to control” means any attempt to control the emotional discomfort *while it is occurring*, including attempts to escape from it. “Attempts to avoid” means any attempt to avoid future emotional discomfort *before it occurs*. See the examples for further clarification.

ATTEMPTS TO AVOID

Example - Avoid optional recitals

Example - Avoid over-expressing myself

so I don't feel embarrassed

Example - Avoiding challenging myself

can "play it safe" in recitals

Next, please rate the effectiveness of each attempt to control and avoid discomfort in actually achieving your goal - in other words, how well were you *actually* able to control the emotional discomfort while it was occurring, and how well were you able to avoid the future discomfort from occurring? Write your answers in terms of percentages from 0 - 100. For example, 0% effective means it has never worked, 25% means it occasionally works, 50% means it works half the time, 75% means it works very often, and 100% means it always works.

ATTEMPTS TO CONTROL

ATTEMPTS TO AVOID

Example - Breathe deeply 60%

Example - Avoid optional recitals 50%

Example - Escape from a performance

Example - Avoid over-expressing myself

when I get too nervous 25%

so I don't feel embarrassed 50%

Example - Drink alcohol or use drugs 60%

Example - Avoiding challenging myself

with more difficult repertoire, so I

can "play it safe" in recitals 40%

Key Idea:

If your attempts to cope with emotional discomfort are less helpful than you would like, and/or if they are pulling you further away from who you want to be as a performer, or as a person, then you might want to consider *increasing your willingness* to feel emotional discomfort as an alternative to controlling, avoiding, or escaping from it.

Lastly, when you're done writing down your percentages, please add them all up (using numbers from both columns) and calculate the average percentage number for all of your coping skills. Once you have that number, ask yourself the following questions - Is that average effectiveness number worth it for me? Are there any unintended costs associated with engaging in these attempts to cope with your emotional discomfort? If so, please go back and write down the costs associated with each attempt to control or avoid on the blank lines on the previous page.

Using the previous examples, here's what we might learn from those attempts to cope:

On average, those attempts to control and avoid discomfort are about **48% effective** ($60 + 25 + 60 + 50 + 50 + 40 = 285$, $285/6 = 47.5$ or 48%). 48% may be worth it to some, but not to others, because it implies your coping skills are working less than half of the time.

Also, here are some possible unintended costs to using those sample coping skills:

"Breathing deeply" may calm me down, but I cannot always do this, especially while anxious. Also, I may over-rely on breathing deeply and never learn to tolerate feeling short of breath."

"Escaping from a performance when I get too nervous" may help me feel better, but I will not be able to finish the performance and my jurors may fail me, or I may lose my job."

"Drinking alcohol or using drugs" may help me feel better, but I may develop an unhealthy dependence on substances."

"Avoiding optional recitals" may help me to avoid future discomfort, but I would prevent myself from having more performance opportunities, which is essential for building confidence."

"Avoiding over-expressing myself so I don't feel embarrassed" may help me to avoid future embarrassment either during performances or not, but I might prevent myself from becoming more expressive, which I value as a performer."

"Avoiding challenging myself with more difficult repertoire, so I can 'play it safe' in recitals" may help me to avoid making future mistakes, but I won't be able to grow as a performer."

If your average effectiveness number was lower than you would like, and/or if some or all of your coping skills have created unintended costs for you in the long term, then please ask yourself another important question - *Are your coping skills bringing you closer to who you want to be as a performer, or as a person, or are they pulling you further away and possibly adding to your emotional suffering?* While it's certainly possible some of your coping skills may be healthy and have little to no long term costs - for example, going to the gym to control emotional discomfort is certainly healthy and usually doesn't create any unintended costs, other than a potential for exercise addiction for some people. However, if this exercise led you

to believe your coping skills may actually be less helpful than you thought, and/or they may be adding to your emotional struggle and suffering, then we invite you to consider increasing your willingness to feel emotional discomfort as an alternative to your making attempts to control, avoid, or escape from it.

EXERCISE: The Finger Trap Metaphor

A simple way to learn about the futility of emotional avoidance strategies is by using a Finger Trap as mentioned above, which again was shown to be more helpful than breath training in managing anxiety (Eifert & Heffner, 2003). You may have played with one of these as a child, but if not, the trap is a narrow tube of woven straw about the size of your index finger (see picture).



Figure 8. Finger trap (own photo).

When you insert both index fingers into the trap - one at both ends - you then push your fingers closer together until they cannot go any further. At this point, the straw tightens and your fingers become stuck inside. Your natural reaction is to quickly pull them out. However, when you do this, the trap actually tightens and it becomes harder to pull your fingers out. The harder you do that, the tighter the trap holds onto them. The way to free your fingers from the trap is by *pushing them into the trap further*, which loosens it and creates more room to wiggle your fingers out, one at a time. This is a great metaphor for how to deal with emotional discomfort... Ironically, by willingly leaning *into* your emotional discomfort - whether it's anxiety, fear, stress, sadness, anger, shame, or something else - you'll allow yourself greater flexibility to act in its presence, and eventually you'll be able to free yourself from it. However, if you attempt to escape from the "trap" of your emotional discomfort, it will strengthen its hold on you, which will likely cause you to struggle further with it and will use up your precious time and energy. Emotional avoidance weakens our will power and only strengthens the thing(s) we are trying to avoid!

Go ahead and play around with the finger trap now for a few moments. While playing with it, see if you can relate the experience of being physically trapped to your experience of unsuccessfully trying to avoid, control, or escape from your emotional distress...

EXERCISE: Tug-of-War with Anxiety Monster

A great way to reduce your suffering and struggle related to anxiety is through the “Tug of War with Anxiety Monster” exercise (Eifert & Forsyth, 2005). Like “The Finger Trap,” this exercise teaches the importance of *letting go of the struggle* with your emotional discomfort, by doing something opposite to what people usually do when in a struggle.

*In this exercise, imagine you are engaged in a tug-of-war with your anxiety, which takes the form of a big, scary-looking monster twice your size, complete with mean eyes and an even meaner attitude! Imagine starting out the tug-of-war by pulling on the rope and immediately noticing how the monster instantly pulls you back towards it, even harder than you did. Then, you notice there is a large pit in between you and the monster. From your perspective, it looks bottomless and if you lose this tug-of-war, you will fall into the pit and the monster will have won! You hear the monster beginning to taunt you, saying things like, “Go ahead and pull the rope. What’s wrong with you? Are you afraid of losing?” Since you don’t want to lose, you fight back. So, you pull and pull, but the harder you pull, it seems the monster just pulls back even harder, drawing you closer to the edge of the pit. You think to yourself, “Do I have what it takes to win this fight?” Well, you certainly don’t want to lose! So you dig your heels in and pull the rope with both hands even harder, using all of your strength, and using both of your feet too, thinking you **MUST** defeat the anxiety monster, because you’re unwilling to allow yourself to lose! Yet, just like before, whenever you pull on the rope, the monster pulls back harder, drawing you further into the tug-of-war, and closer to the pit... ... By this point, you figure you’ll either have to keep fighting against the monster harder than before, or you’ll have to let the monster win because you’ll be totally worn out.*

*Well, another way to proceed in this scenario is a way that probably didn’t occur to you yet, because you were so busy fighting. **You can drop the rope and end the struggle.** This solution may be hard to think of when fully engaged in the tug-of-war, because all of your strength and attention are directed at trying to “win against your anxiety.” But your job here isn’t to win the tug-of-war, your job is to avoid falling into the bottomless pit... Just imagine, what might happen if you drop the rope and end the fight sooner with your anxiety monster? Are you willing to let go of the struggle and see what happens? If you’re brave enough to do that, you will learn the fight ends when you let go, **and** yet the anxiety monster is still there. It may try to engage you further once you drop the rope, and it may scream and shout at you, saying things like, “Come on, what’s wrong with you? You’re supposed to beat me! You can’t just give up like that!” However, when you let go of the struggle with your anxiety, you also learn you have a choice in the matter. You don’t have to pick up the rope and re-engage in the fight if you choose not to. If you let go, the anxiety will still be there, because you cannot make it go away. Yet, now that your hands and feet are free, you can choose to focus on something else instead, something that matters more to you than your anxiety... perhaps something else you used to focus on, before the anxiety became such a monster in the first place... The choice is yours...*

Please note - if you’re a practitioner working with a musician who has MPA, we encourage you to do this exercise as a role-play, with you playing the part of the anxiety monster. You can use a simple bath towel or power cord if you don’t have a rope, and make sure to engage the musician in a dialogue that uses much of the script above, so they really understand the message you’re trying to communicate, i.e., that letting go of the struggle with anxiety, aka “dropping the rope,” may be more helpful in the long run, if they are willing to do so.

EXERCISE: Highlighting the Positive Features of Your Unwanted Behavior

This technique actually stems from a technique used in a third-wave couples therapy (IBCT; Jacobson & Christensen, 1998) as a way to enhance emotional tolerance and willingness within relationships. When working with couples, these psychologists would teach one partner to “reframe” their experience of some negative behavior of their spouse’s by highlighting the positive features of that behavior. The logic was that if spouses could see the benefits of their partner’s unwanted behavior, they may be able to tolerate it better. For example, one partner was originally attracted to his spouse’s talkativeness in the beginning of their relationship, but later on he started viewing it as annoying and excessive. He can build tolerance for his partner’s talkativeness by actively reminding himself he originally was attracted to his partner *because of* her talkativeness, and he used to view that as a positive quality. Therefore, whenever he feels annoyed with her talkativeness, he can reframe the way he experiences it, so it doesn’t bother him as much. In fact, doing so may help him realize he still finds it to be an attractive quality of hers! In teaching this reframing technique, these psychologists were able to increase numerous couples’ tolerance of the emotional distress connected to their partners’ unwanted behaviors, which helped strengthen their marriages (Christensen, Atkins, Baucom, & Yi, 2010).

Here, you’ll learn to use the reframe technique with yourself, not with your partner, and you’ll learn to highlight some unwanted behavior(s) of yours that causes *you* distress, by reminding yourself of the positive quality of it. Doing so will help you view your negative behavior more neutrally, which is a sign you’ve increased your emotional tolerance of it.

Following the examples below, can you use the reframe technique to think of the positive qualities of any of your unwanted behaviors?

[illegible]

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...

EXERCISE: The Pen Exercise

Here, we present this simple exercise as a dialogue between an ACT practitioner and you (the musician), because this is how it appears in other ACT books. However, if you are reading this alone, feel free to assume both roles and guide yourself through each successive part of the dialogue.

To start, take a normal pen and place it in front of the client, either on a table or on the floor, in front of them. Then, engage them in a dialogue.

ACT Practitioner:

“Please *try* to pick up the pen. Try as hard as you can, go ahead now and *try*.”

(When the client actually goes to pick up the pen, we interrupt them.)

“Wait stop - you are actually picking up the pen. I asked you to *try* to pick it up instead.”

Client:

(At this point the client appears confused.)

“Right, I cannot try to pick it up, either I pick it up or not.”

Practitioner:

“So what happens when you try to pick it up then?”

Client:

“I hover my hand over the pen, but I don’t pick it up.”

Practitioner:

“Exactly. By *trying* you are actually not picking it up. Trying is the same as not doing. It boils down to a choice to either pick it up or not. Willingness is the same. First you make a choice about whether you are willing or not to have your emotional discomfort, and then you remain willing while you take action. There is no grey area here - either you’re willing or not to pick up the pen, similarly, either you are willing or not to be with your emotional discomfort... So, I’ll ask you now - are you willing to have it?”

If they say yes, praise them for their bravery! If they say no or are unsure, you can use the following “Willingness Dial” exercise to enhance their motivation to increase emotional willingness, with their permission.

EXERCISE: The Willingness Dial

Another tool to increase emotional willingness and to teach the difference between what willingness is/is not is through the “Willingness Dial” exercise (Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 1999). Again, you can either read it alone, or you can have an ACT practitioner read it to you to generate a discussion afterwards.

Imagine you’re looking at two dials, like the ones on an old radio to control the volume. One of the dials is called “Unwanted emotions” and the other is called “Willingness.” Both of these dials go from 0 to 10. (Practitioner draws two circular radio dials, and labels them “Unwanted emotions” and “Willingness” and includes the numbers from 0 to 10). When you first came here for help, you were probably thinking your anxiety or other emotional discomfort was too high (points to the 10 on the “Unwanted emotions” dial). Instead, you probably wanted it to be here (points to the 0 on the dial). On the other hand, your “Willingness dial” was probably doing the complete opposite (points while talking) - e.g., when your unwanted emotions were too high (points), you set your “Willingness dial” to a low number (points), because you did not want to feel that discomfort. Is that right? Well, now that you’re learning to be with your thoughts and feelings through the mindfulness exercises in the last chapter, and you’re learning to cultivate a more accepting attitude towards unwanted thoughts and feelings in this chapter, you have been increasing the setting on your “Willingness dial” to see what happens. You are probably still more concerned with what the “Unwanted emotions” dial is doing, right? Here’s the thing though - the “Willingness dial” is really the more important of the two, because it’s the one that makes a bigger difference in your life. When your “Unwanted emotions” dial is set too high, and you try to bring it down, you inadvertently set your “Willingness dial” to 0. This is because when you’re unwilling to have your discomfort, you give yourself more to be upset about, which makes that dial lock into place on its own. In other words, when you’re unwilling to have the emotional discomfort, you’re stuck with it. This mentality can make you feel like a victim of your own emotions!

The way out of this trap is by focusing more on the dial you ACTUALLY have control over - the “Willingness dial.” By attempting to keep your “Unwanted emotions” dial below a certain level, you were making yourself feel helpless or like a victim. But that’s not your fault, because you simply don’t get to control that dial. Think about it for a moment - you have tried so many times to keep this dial down, but it hasn’t worked has it? That’s not because you didn’t try hard enough, in fact you did, rather, it’s because none of us get to control that dial. It is simply not something humans are particularly good at controlling... However, the “Willingness dial” IS controllable - you can set it at any level you want, at any time. It’s always your choice to set it at a higher level or at lower one. And while we may not know what will happen in the future to your “Unwanted emotions” dial if you give up control of it, one thing we do know is that if you set your “Willingness dial” to a higher number, things may start to happen in your life that are more within your control. You may even start doing more of the things you actually want to be doing, because you will be making a CHOICE to do them, with or without your unwanted emotions present. Remember, control of emotional discomfort is the PROBLEM, not the solution.

1 of 2

Example - "I must not make a mistake in my upcoming performance."

Example - “I don’t want to practice right now.”

In addition to thoughts, we can also become fused with other, troubling internal experiences, like memories, urges to say or do something, physiological sensations, cravings, or emotions. Now take a moment to write down some of these other internal experiences you may be fused with. Again, you can tell you're fused with these other experiences when they occupy the center of your mind and seem very real or important, and you feel compelled to do something about them.

EXERCISE: Becoming Aware of Other Internal Experiences You Are Fused With 2 of 2

Please note - these experiences may not seem “believable,” because they are not verbal experiences and therefore do not literally reflect upon reality. However, they can seem very important, because you feel compelled to respond to them. So we changed the language here to include “seems very real” and “seems very important.”

Example - The urge to avoid practicing right now

Example - The memory of a failed audition

Example - The sensation of shortness of breath

Example - Shaky, cold hands

EXERCISE: List the Components of Your Relational Frames that Cause You Distress

Before we discuss how to free yourself from getting too fused with troubling thoughts or other internal experiences that may be part of a larger network for you, first let's have you describe in more detail the thoughts or internal experiences in your networks that are unwanted. Please write the derived relation in parentheses below the first statement, as well as other key word(s) in the network that create distress for you. Try and keep your key word(s) as short as possible, because you'll need to remember them later in this chapter.

1) Relations of Similarity or Opposition

Example Relation - *"I'm equally bad as the worst violinist, even though I'm first violinist."*

Derived Example - *("The worst violinist is equally bad as me.")*

Key Word(s) in the Network that Evoke Distress - *equally bad, the worst*

Relation -

Derived Relation -

Key Word(s) that Evoke Distress -

Relation -

Derived Relation -

Key Word(s) that Evoke Distress -

Relation -

Derived Relation -

Key Word(s) that Evoke Distress -

2) Relations of Time

Time Example Relation - *"Before my accident, I was much happier than I am now."*

Reverse Derived Example - *("After my accident I am unhappy.")*

Key Word(s) in the Network that Evoke Distress - *accident, unhappy, was much happier*

Relation - _____

Derived Relation - _____

Key Word(s) that Evoke Distress - _____

Relation - _____

Derived Relation - _____

Key Word(s) that Evoke Distress - _____

Relation - _____

Derived Relation - _____

Key Word(s) that Evoke Distress - _____

3) Relations of Cause/Effect

Cause/Effect Example Relation - "If I make a mistake, then the audience will judge me."

Reverse Derived Example - ("If I don't make a mistake, the audience won't judge me.")

Key Word(s) in the Network that Evoke Distress - mistake, judge me

Relation - _____

Derived Relation - _____

Key Word(s) that Evoke Distress - _____

Relation - _____

Derived Relation - _____

Key Word(s) that Evoke Distress - _____

Relation - _____

Derived Relation - _____

Key Word(s) that Evoke Distress - _____

4) Relations of Comparison and Evaluation

Example Relation - *"My vocal instructor thinks I should perform better than I am now."*

Reverse Derived Example - *("My current performance is worsen than it should be.")*

Key Word(s) in the Network that Evoke Distress - *should perform better, worsen*

Relation -

Derived Relation -

Key Word(s) that Evoke Distress -

Relation -

Derived Relation -

Key Word(s) that Evoke Distress -

Relation -

Derived Relation -

Key Word(s) that Evoke Distress -

EXERCISE: Thought Labeling

The technique described previously of saying to yourself “*I notice I’m having the thought that _____*” is an example of labeling your thoughts. When we label our thoughts as they are happening, we are less likely to get hooked by them. This simple technique helps us catch ourselves in the act of thinking, without getting mindlessly carried away by it. This technique can also be used to label other internal experiences aside from our thoughts, i.e., emotions or feelings, urges, memories, bodily sensations, mental evaluations, among others. When you use this technique, please follow these basic formulas below:

“*I notice I’m having the thought that _____ (insert the actual thought here) _____.*”

Example - “*I notice I’m having the thought that (I may get into a car accident today).*”

“*I notice I’m having the feeling of _____ (label the feeling here) _____.*”

Example - “*I notice I’m having the feeling of _____ (sadness, anxiety, joy, etc.) _____.*”

“*I notice I’m having the urge to _____ (label the urge here) _____.*”

Example - “*I notice I’m having the urge to _____ (avoid going to my voice lesson) _____.*”

“*I notice I’m having the memory of _____ (label the memory here) _____.*”

Example - “*I notice I’m having the memory of _____ (my last vocal jury) _____.*”

“*I notice I’m having the sensation of _____ (label the sensation here) _____.*”

Example - “*I notice I’m having the sensation of _____ (shortness of breath, dizziness, etc.) _____.*”

“*I notice I’m having the evaluation that _____ (label the evaluation here) _____.*”

Example - “*I notice I’m having the evaluation that (my last jury performance was bad) _____.*”

Now it’s your turn to practice labeling some of your most troublesome thoughts and other internal experiences that interfere with your performances in the space below. Be sure to use thoughts that include your key words:

Key Idea:

You'll know you're getting the hang of defusion when you can experience a normally troublesome thought (or other internal experience, like a memory, urge, sensation, etc.) as if it were a passing mental event, rather than it staying at the front and center of your mind.

EXERCISE: Word Repetition to Form New Associations

Take a neutral word like “milk” and quickly repeat it aloud, over and over again, for 30 seconds. Just keep repeating it until you reach the time limit. Go for it!

“Milk, milk, milk, milk, milk, milk, milk, milk, milk, milk, ...”

What did you notice? Well, ACT researchers have shown that when doing this exercise for no less than 20 seconds, and no more than 45 seconds, the word milk starts to lose its literal meaning and sounds like non-sense or gibberish instead (Masuda et al., 2004). Remarkably, this quick exercise reminds us how much we’ve been conditioned to respond to the literal meanings of words, so much so we often fail to recognize a spoken word for what it really is - a sound produced by our mouths and lungs.

Now try the same exercise again, but this time try using some of your key words you wrote in the previous section. Say them aloud quickly, over and over again, for 30 seconds again. See what happens, if anything, to the meaning of those words.

Example, “worst, worst, worst, worst, worst, worst, worst, worst, ...”

“mistake, mistake, mistake, mistake, mistake, mistake, mistake, ...”

Try this exercise with other words likely to evoke strong emotions, like solo, failure, or shame.

“solo, solo, solo, solo, solo, solo, solo, solo, solo, solo, ...”

“failure, failure, failure, failure, failure, failure, failure, failure, ...”

“shame, shame, shame, shame, shame, shame, shame, shame, ...”

Key Idea:

When your mind relaxes and generates new associations to a troubling word, you are becoming less fused with that word.

What happened in your mind after doing this exercise with your key words? Did they lose their literal meaning? Did they start to sound like gibberish? Or did nothing happen, and they kept their same meanings? If so, please do the exercise again until the words start to lose their meaning, or until your mind relaxes and starts generating new associations to the words. That is a key sign that you’re becoming less fused with the word - you start to hear it differently and your mind generates new associations to it.

Doing this exercise over time can help us start the process of disentangling ourselves from years of verbal conditioning that is likely causing us psychological distress, and in doing so, we can undermine the harmful effects of buying into our relational networks too much. When overly fused with the words/thoughts and other internal experiences that make up the components of our mental networks, our quality of life worsens and we find ourselves moving in directions we don’t really want to go in. Learning to see words as words, thoughts as

thoughts, memories as memories, sensations as sensations, etc., is very liberating and is also essential if you want to decrease your psychological suffering *and* improve your performances.

EXERCISE: Treating The Mind Like a Separate Entity and Describing What it's Doing, then Thanking Your Mind for the Thoughts it Creates

This exercise consists of two defusion techniques in one. First, you pretend your mind is a separate, external organism that lives inside you. Sometimes it's fun to give it a memorable name to really play up the technique. For example, you can call your mind something plain like "my mind," or you can get really creative with it, like "Mental Headquarters," or "Where Wild Thoughts Roam," etc. And whenever you catch yourself thinking, you describe what's happening in your mind organism. Next, you then express appreciation for the mental products you noticed your mind has created. Expressing gratitude for what your mind is doing will further cultivate a neutral and willing stance towards it.

Here are some examples:

You catch yourself having the thought, *"What if I get into a car accident today?"*

Then, you respond by simply saying, ***"Thanks, mind, for that thought," or "Thanks, Mental Headquarters, for that thought."***

You catch yourself obsessively thinking a series of thoughts related to your upcoming performance, some of which include, *"What if I don't perform it perfectly," "What if my conductor knows when I mess up," "What will my colleagues think of me if I mess up,"* etc.

Then, you respond in more detail by saying, ***"Thanks, mind, for all these thoughts about my upcoming performance. Wow, you're really on a roll there!"***

You judge yourself repeatedly after a performance because you don't feel you did as well as you could have. You notice yourself having a series of thoughts, some of which include, *"I totally messed up that one part," "I don't deserve to be first violinist in this orchestra," "If only my instructor knew how untalented I really am, she would stop working with me,"* etc.

Then, you respond by describing what your mind is doing, ***"Wow, my mind is really busy generating some judgmental thoughts. It's been doing that over and over again for about 30 minutes now."***

Now, you try the techniques of pretending your mind is a separate entity, describing what it is doing, and then expressing appreciation for the products your mind creates.

[illegible]

EXERCISE: Other Defusion Techniques

Here are some other defusion exercises you might like to try:

Sound it Out - here you say your most troublesome thoughts aloud, or to yourself, very slowly.

Sing it Out - here you sing your troublesome thoughts aloud as they are occurring.

Rap it Out - here you rap your troublesome thoughts aloud as they occurring.

Silly Voices - here you say your troublesome thoughts aloud in silly voices, e.g., in a Donald Duck voice, or as SpongeBob SquarePants.

Mary Had a Little _____ - here you say a common phrase but leave out the last word, which shows how automatic some of our own thoughts have become.

For example, *"If only I'd _____,"* and *"I should've never _____."*

Carry the Cards - here you write down your troublesome thoughts onto 3" x 5" index cards, and then carry them with you in your pocket. This teaches you that you can bring troublesome thoughts along for the ride without responding to them.

What Are the Numbers? - here you repeatedly teach yourself a random sequence of numbers, e.g., "4, 5, 9," and then point out the arbitrariness, yet permanence, of this mental event. Similarly, our thoughts involve arbitrary relations between objects/events and can become permanently embedded into our memories.

Find Something that Cannot Be Evaluated - here you look around the room and notice that every single thing can be evaluated negatively, though arbitrarily.

Thought Translation - here you translate your troublesome thoughts into another language of your choosing while they are occurring.

Reverse Order - here you reverse the order of the words in your troublesome thoughts while they are occurring, e.g., "Strange is exercise this."

EXERCISE: Becoming Aware of Your Mind's Stories about You

Please write down several of the most prevalent self-stories your mind tells you repeatedly. These are the stories that occur whenever you're going through a hard time, especially a time that challenges you to grow as a musician or as a human. Also, please write down whether each story is limiting or not limiting your growth as a musician or human. Self-stories that are not limiting your growth are based on non-arbitrary relations your mind makes between you and other people, or between you and yourself. For example, they involve a part of you that is always the same, under any situation or context. Limiting self-stories are based on arbitrary relations that can change, depending on the context. We include examples of both below:

1) Story Example - NOT LIMITING

<i>"Compared to other singers, I am a Mezzo-Soprano."</i>	<i>(based on non-arbitrary properties of my voice) (Regardless of the context, my voice is always this way.)</i>
---	--

2) Story Example - LIMITING

<i>"If I had to typecast myself, I'd say I am only a comedic singer."</i>	<i>(based on arbitrary equivalence between the self and role of a comedic singer) (When anxious I tend to avoid it by expressing it as humor, but I don't always want to perform in comedic roles.)</i>
---	---

3) Story Example - LIMITING

<i>"If I give a failed performance, then I am a failure as a musician."</i>	<i>(based on arbitrary equating of myself with my self-evaluation of my performance)</i>
---	--

4) Story Example - LIMITING

<i>"I am not the musician I should be."</i>	<i>(based on arbitrary distinction between you and verbal concept of "who you should be")</i>
---	---

ADAPTED EXERCISE: Creating a Flexible Sense of Self as a Musician

This exercise is an adaptation of the “Defusion II” protocol used in Carmen Luciano and colleagues’ (2011) study that helped to significantly reduce high risk adolescents’ impulsive and emotion-driven behavior. It was chosen as the basis for this adapted exercise, because Luciano and colleagues observed significant improvements in defusion and perspective taking abilities for the adolescents who received this intervention. Their protocol was modified here to apply to the experiences of musicians.

Now, we invite you to recall the same performance you thought of in Chapter 4, in the “Acceptance of Performance-Related Thoughts and Feelings” exercise. Focus also on any key words in your recollection that evoke distress for you, like you did in Chapter 5. If the performance you used in the “Acceptance of Performance-Related Thoughts and Feelings” exercise did not evoke any troubling thoughts or feelings for you, please think of a different performance now that does cause some distress to recall. Once you have one in mind, and the key words related to it that cause you distress, you are ready to begin.

1) Please write down any troubling thoughts or memories you recall now about your performance. If you can, include any key words that cause you distress.

Example - “I didn’t perform as well as I should have.”

Key words - *should have, as well as*

Example - “I always mess up that one part when my professor is directly listening.”

Key words - always mess up, one part, when my professor is directly listening.

Example - *"I'm just a bad singer, I can't do anything right."*

Key words - just a bad singer, can't do anything right

[illegible]

2) Now, read the following instructions below and answer any question you'd like about your troubling thoughts and memories in the spaces provided.

*For each thought you wrote, ask yourself - are you able to see it as a thought? Who is the one having this troublesome thought? Are you able to notice you are the one having the thought? Please write down the most troublesome memory too. Are you able to see it as a memory too? Who is the one having this troubling memory? Can you notice you are the one having that memory? Do you realize you can observe these thoughts and memories passing through your mind, just like you observe what you wrote on this paper above? Your thoughts and memories are written on this paper, and you are separate from them, observing them. To strengthen this difference in perspective, you can say aloud, "I am **here** (placing your hand on your chest), and my thoughts and memories are written **there, on the paper** (pointing to them)," and also say "Just like, I am **here** (hand on chest), and my thoughts and memories are **there, in my mind** (pointing to your head)."*

Now, are these troubling thoughts and memories part of a story you often tell yourself? If so, what is the story about? Can you write a summary of the story below? Do your key words come up in the writing the story? If so, which ones?

*Ask yourself - who is telling the story? Is it you? Or your mind? Are you able to notice it is your mind that tells the story, and not you? Also, can you notice your mind linking key words to your story, and how it is not you doing that? You are separate from your story and its key words. To strengthen this different perspective again, say aloud, "I am **here** (hand on chest), and my story is written **there, on the paper** (points to it)," and also say "Just like, I am **here** (hand on chest), and my story is occurring **there, in my mind** (points to head)." Are you also able to notice your story is actually composed of individual thoughts and memories?*

3) Next, please write down any unwanted emotions, sensations or urges you can recall now about your performance. By urges, we mean an unwanted urge to say or do something.

Example - anxiety (emotion)

Example - urge to judge myself negatively

Example - neck tension (sensation)

4) Now, read these similar instructions below and answer any question you'd like about your unwanted emotions, sensations and urges in the spaces provided.

*For each emotion, sensation, or urge you wrote, ask yourself - are you able to see it as an emotion, sensation, or urge? Who is the one having this emotion, sensation, or urge? Are you able to notice you are the one having the emotion, sensation, or urge? Do you realize you can observe these experiences pass through your mind and body, just like you observe what you wrote on this paper above? Your emotions, sensations, and urges are written on this paper, and you are separate from them, observing them. To strengthen this difference in perspective, you can say aloud, "I am **here** (hand on your chest), and my emotions, sensations, and urges are written **there, on the paper** (pointing to them)," and also say "Just like, I am **here** (hand on chest), and my emotions, sensations, and urges are **there, in my body** (pointing to where they are felt in your body)."*

Now, are these unwanted emotions, sensations, or urges part of your story from before? If so, what is the connection? Please write down the connection below.

Ask yourself - who is making the connection to your story? Is it you? Or your mind? Are you able to notice it is your mind that connects these internal experiences to your story, and not you? Often times, those connections are made using key words too. It doesn't matter whether you are having troublesome thoughts, memories, emotions, sensations, or urges. Your mind will always connect those experiences to your larger story, without needing you to step in. Yet, you are separate from your story, and you are separate from the connections your mind is making to your story. To strengthen this difference again, say aloud, "I am **here** (hand on chest), and the connections my mind makes to my story are written **there, on the paper** (points to it)," and also say "Just like, I am **here** (hand on chest), and the connections my mind makes to my story are occurring **there, in my mind** (points to head)."

5) Lastly, read the instructions below and answer any question you'd like about how to flexibly respond to your troubling internal experiences in the spaces provided.

Recall a time when these troubling experiences got the best of you. Was it the same performance you recalled already? Or a different one? It doesn't matter, just recall when your troublesome thoughts, memories, emotions, sensations, or urges got the best of you either before, during, or after a tough performance. **Now, please take a mental picture of what you did when these internal experiences got the best of you.** Do you have that picture in mind? If yes, write down a word(s) below to describe what you are doing in that mental picture. Here are some examples:

Example - I avoided the performance.

Example - I judged myself.

Now, imagine those troubling internal experiences are not only separate from you, but smaller than you. To help with this - imagine each of those experiences as an individual cloud in the sky, and you are the sky itself. Some clouds are small and pass relatively quickly, like certain thoughts or sensations, whereas others are much larger and stay longer, like certain emotions. Some clouds are seemingly always there, like your most lasting stories. However, they're all just clouds... Are you able to notice how the sky is larger than the clouds? Similarly, can you see that you are bigger than, and separate from your thoughts, memories, emotions, sensations, urges, and even your biggest and most troubling stories?

With this in mind, **please take another mental picture of how you'd act if that troubling thought, memory, emotion, sensation, urge, or story did NOT get the best of you.** In other words, what do you really want to do? Instead of letting these experiences take charge of you, how can YOU take charge of you? Once you have that mental picture, please write down a word(s) to describe what you are doing in it. Below are some examples:

Example - INSTEAD of avoiding the performance, I WILL SHOW UP ANYWAY.

Example - INSTEAD of judging myself, I WILL BE KIND.

As this exercise ends, hopefully now you are learning to create an "Observing Self" inside you to tap into whenever you are over-identified with your thoughts, memories, emotions, sensations, or urges, and are allowing them to define you. You are both separate from and bigger than your most troublesome internal experiences, including the stories your mind has been telling you for some time now. By simply observing those experiences you learn to not be defined by them, which can help you respond more flexibly to them when going through a difficult experience that challenges how you identify yourself.

EXERCISE: The Chessboard Metaphor

This exercise comes from Eifert and Forsyth's (2005) elaboration on the original "Chessboard Metaphor" from Hayes, Strosahl and Wilson's first edition ACT text book (1999). Like previous exercises, we present this as a dialogue between a practitioner and you (the musician), because this is how it appears in other books. If you are reading this alone, however, feel free to read along with both roles to help you better understand the lesson.

We recommend using an actual chessboard for this exercise, complete with both teams' pieces on the board, in their starting positions. If you don't have one, you can easily find a picture of a fully ready chessboard online. Also, if you don't know how to play chess, that is ok, you can still understand the general idea of trying to outsmart your opponent and knocking their pieces off of the board.

Look at this chessboard. It's got black pieces one on side (points) and white pieces on the other (points again). If you know how to play chess, you know the white pieces battle against the black ones, and vice versa. The goal is to defeat your opponent by using your pieces to put them in a position where they can no longer move their pieces. Well... you can think of your internal experiences, like your thoughts and emotions, as similar to these pieces on the board. On the one hand, you have your "bad" or unwanted thoughts and emotions, like anxiety or depression, represented here by the black pieces (points), and they hang out together on this side of the board. Whereas, over here on the other side (points) are your "good" thoughts and emotions, like confidence, joy, etc., represented by the white pieces. The pieces from both sides advance towards pieces from the opposite team in an effort to defeat the other side and take control of the whole board. For example, (grabs a black horse piece) - when the dark knight of "team anxiety" attacks your pawn (knocks over a white pawn), you take your white queen (grabs the piece) and head right into battle with that knight in retaliation, by thinking or doing something to effectively defeat it and remain confident or joyful (using the white queen, knock the knight and several other pieces off the board to intensify this sense of battle or struggle).

(Here it becomes a dialogue).

ACT Practitioner:

"What happens next? Is 'team anxiety' defeated or are they still standing?"

Client:

"No, some other piece will step up and knock me down again."

Practitioner:

"Maybe you're right, there are still so many players left on that side, and they could attack you at any moment."

Client:

"That's exactly how it feels sometimes, but can't I defeat them all by using smart tactics? Eventually all of my anxious thoughts and feelings should be eliminated, right?"

Practitioner:

“What has your experience taught you?”

Client:

“Well, it hasn’t really worked when I’ve tried to eliminate them all. Maybe I’m just not smart enough...”

Practitioner:

“This game is different than an actual chess game, though. If this was a real game of chess, you actually could reliably defeat your opponent by outsmarting them time after time. However, this game is different. Here, there may be two sides, but the only player is **YOU**. You are waging a war against yourself. The thoughts and emotions on the ‘bad’ side are a part of you, just like the ‘good’ thoughts and emotions are also a part of you. Both sides belong to you. Yet, if you are unwilling to have the ‘bad’ thoughts and emotions, you’ll find yourself endlessly battling against them; and no matter which side wins, one part of you must also be the loser... You can’t win a battle where you are competing against yourself, because that means part of you is your own enemy. Unlike chess, this is a game you simply cannot win. Whenever you knock down a piece from ‘team anxiety,’ another one eventually will come back to knock you down again. So the battle wages on, for days, months, or even years...”

Client:

“Exactly, and it’s incredibly tiring to keep engaging in that battle too.”

Practitioner:

“Let’s take a step back and think about things from a bigger perspective... What if I were to ask you, which side are ‘you’ in this game? Are you the good side or the bad side?”

Client:

“I’m not sure, I guess I’m the good pieces? Although, lately I’m relating more to the bad pieces...”

Practitioner:

“Well, what if I were to tell you that you aren’t either of those sides? You, in fact, are the **BOARD**. Without the board, the battle between sides wouldn’t occur in the first place. The board is the space in which the battle occurs, but it’s separate from either side and from the battle as a whole. If you identify with the board, then it simply won’t matter which side wins. The board doesn’t care if there’s a winner or whether the battle wages on or not, it just provides the space for both sides to battle against each other... However, if you identify with a certain side, then it **DOES** matter which side wins, and it gets very personal if your ‘side’ isn’t the winner.”

Client:

“So I’m not my negative thoughts and feelings, and I’m also not my positive thoughts and feelings?”

Practitioner:

“Yes! Like the chessboard, you are the one who observes it all, whether it is an anxiety related thought or feeling, or a feeling of confidence or joy. You are not your thoughts or feelings, rather, they are a part of you, and they are occurring in you. If you identify with the observer in you, then you become an impartial witness to your internal experiences, and you won’t need them to be different than how they actually are. Like the board, you’ll have no stake in the game and won’t care which ‘side’ wins.”

EXERCISE: Questions to Help Identify Your Performance-Related Values

1) In attempting to identify what your performance-related values are, ACT practitioners will often ask a series of questions. Some general, introductory questions are below:

What is most important about being a musician to you?

What do you stand for as a musician?

How do you want to be known or remembered as a musician?

2) Some more specific questions that identify one's performance-related values using phrases commonly used by musicians are below:

When you're performing at your best, what are you doing exactly in your performance?

When you see others performing at their best, what are they doing in their performance?

When you're making good musical decisions, what are you doing?

When someone else is making good musical decisions, what are they doing?

3) Furthermore, some questions that help uncover one's performance-related values as they relate to their goals are below:

What are some important future goals you want to achieve in your performances, and why are they important?

What were some important goals you achieved in the last year or two in your performances, and why were they important?

In general, what are some important goals any musician should have?

4) Also, ACT practitioners often use the presence or absence of emotion as an indicator of the presence or absence of some important performance-related value(s). When in the presence of that valued thing or activity, the musician feels its rewarding effects, i.e., like a rush of excitement, or a full engagement with the activity, whereas when in the absence of that valued thing or activity, the musician feels distressed by its absence. Here are some examples of questions uncovering the emotional component of one's performance-related values:

Whenever you are feeling alive or excited during your performances, what are you typically doing?

Whenever someone else's performance leaves you feeling alive or excited, what are they typically doing?

When in a state of full engagement with your performance, what are you typically doing?

When you observe others in a state of full engagement with their performances, what are they typically doing?

Have you ever had a sad feeling related to your performances, or related to being a musician, if so - can you say why?

Would it make you sad if you gave up performing? Why? Would you miss out on anything important?

If your emotional distress weren't bothering you as much, what else would you focus on in your performances?

5) Lastly, ACT practitioners often attempt to link states of motivation and increased action to a musician's performance-related values, so they can make that association. Here are some examples of questions:

What do you have a craving to do more of in your performances?

What are you naturally motivated to do during your performances?

Tell me about a time(s) in your career as a musician when you were feeling inspired or motivated. What do you think made you feel that way?

What is it about being a musician that keeps you motivated to perform?

ADAPTED EXERCISE: Guest Speakers at Your Retirement Dinner Party

This exercise is an adaptation of Eifert and Forsyth's (2005) "Write Your Own Epitaph" and Gardner and Moore's (2007) "Performance Obituary" exercises, both of which have been shown to help with the identification of one's values. In both exercises, the reader is asked to think of what they want written on their tombstones after they've died, which generates values-related thoughts about what they stand for and how they want to be remembered. However, in order to keep the focus more on your performance-related values, rather than your personal ones, we've changed the scenario here to a retirement dinner party, in which your career is being celebrated by several guest speakers of your choosing. This will enable you to think specifically about how you want to be remembered as a musician, which should generate some of your important performance-related values. Plus, this scenario is somewhat less morbid!

Another way to uncover your performance-related values is to think of yourself as having two career paths, and each will engender a different story about you at your retirement dinner party. The first is your most valued and desired career path, in which you've achieved all or nearly all of the accomplishments you sought to achieve in your career, regardless of the hurdles you faced. You found a way to overcome them and stick to what was most important to you throughout your entire career as a musician. Think of the accomplishments you may have achieved and then imagine what the invited speakers at your retirement dinner party will say about you and your career. The second career path is much different... It is one marked by much emotional distress, struggle and suffering, setbacks, lack of success, and chronic difficulty. On this path you weren't able to succeed because you would have encountered too many barriers along the way, and you didn't have the willingness to move forward because of the emotional distress involved in doing so. Think of all the ways you may have attempted to avoid, escape, or control that emotional distress on this second career path, and then imagine what the guest speakers might say differently about you at your retirement dinner party.

Once you know what to say in each scenario, please write it down in the appropriate area below.

SUCCESSFUL SCENARIO:

Example Sentences - He (you) was ambitious and very fiercely determined to succeed at all costs, and he didn't give up when things got tough. There was a period when he struggled to get hired by several orchestras he auditioned for, but he persevered and eventually was hired by one. He remained true to his belief that performing and sharing music with others is a joyful act, and when he performed you could really see and feel the joy he was putting into his performances. It was magical sometimes to see him in action.

[illegible]

UNSUCCESSFUL SCENARIO:

Example Sentences - He (you) had a string of setbacks in which his anxiety got the best of him while auditioning for top tier orchestras, and he was unable to get any call backs, so he fell into a pretty debilitating depressive state that lasted for a few years. During this time he constantly questioned his worth as a musician and often thought of quitting the field entirely. He also swore off all future auditions, because he couldn't face the possibility of getting rejected one more time. He would take jobs here and there to help pay the bills, but he was pretty unreliable and would show up late or unprepared, and sometimes he would drink on the job just to help himself feel better.

[illegible]

EXERCISE: Writing Your Own Performance Mission Statement

Now it's your turn to start writing your Performance Mission Statement! Follow the two-step format discussed already and the examples below, then please write your own Performance Mission Statement during the exercise and again at the very end. If you have more than one performance-related value, or more than one valued action per each value, combine your statements together into a more comprehensive Performance Mission Statement.

Example #1**Formula for only one value with one valued action:**

I value being a expressive musician,
by (example of valued action) expressing my emotions when they occur.

Performance Mission Statement:

"I value being an expressive musician by expressing my emotions when they occur."

Example #2**Formula for one value with multiple valued actions:**

I value being a expressive musician,
by (example of valued action) expressing my emotions when they occur,
and/or by (example of valued action) expressing thoughts/motives of my character,
and/or by (example of valued action),
etc.

Performance Mission Statement:

"I value being an expressive musician by expressing my emotions when they occur, and by expressing the thoughts and motives of my character."

Example #3**Formula for two values with one valued action per each value:**

I value being a expressive musician,
by (example of valued action) expressing my emotions when they occur.

and

I also value being a technically skilled musician _____,
by (example of valued action) repeatedly focusing on proper technique.

Performance Mission Statement:

"I value being an expressive musician by expressing my emotions when they occur, and I also value being a technically skilled musician by repeatedly focusing on proper technique."

Example #4

Formula for two values, each with multiple valued actions:

I value being a expressive musician _____,
by (example of valued action) expressing my emotions when they occur ,
and/or by (example of valued action) expressing thoughts/motives of my character ,
and/or by (example of valued action) _____ ,
etc.

and

I also value being a technically skilled musician _____,
by (example of valued action) repeatedly focusing on proper technique ,
and/or by (example of valued action) seeking to learn new techniques ,
and/or by (example of valued action) _____ ,
etc.

Performance Mission Statement:

"I value being an expressive musician by expressing my emotions when they occur, and by expressing the thoughts and motives of my character. I also value being a technically skilled musician by repeatedly focusing on proper technique, and by seeking to learn new techniques."

Key Idea:

Your Performance Mission Statement is a statement that reflects your performance-related value or values, and it includes an example or examples of *what* valued actions you can take to illustrate each value. Once you define your Performance Mission Statement, you can use it to more easily create goals that show *how* you will carry out each valued action in a concrete and measurable way.

Here are some blank formulas and blank Performance Mission Statements for you to fill out:

Formula for only one value with one valued action:

I value being a _____,
by (example of valued action) _____.

Performance Mission Statement:

Formula for one value with multiple valued actions:

I value being a _____,
by (example of valued action) _____,
and/or by (example of valued action) _____,
and/or by (example of valued action) _____,
etc.

Performance Mission Statement:

Formula for two values with one valued action per each value:

I value being a _____,
by (example of valued action) _____.

and

I also value being a _____,
by (example of valued action) _____.

Performance Mission Statement:

Formula for two values, each with multiple valued actions:

I value being a _____,
by (example of valued action) _____,
and/or by (example of valued action) _____,
and/or by (example of valued action) _____,
etc.

and

I also value being a _____,
by (example of valued action) _____,
and/or by (example of valued action) _____,
and/or by (example of valued action) _____,
etc.

Performance Mission Statement:

Formula for multiple values, each with multiple valued actions:

I value being a _____,
by (example of valued action) _____,

and/or by (example of valued action) _____,
and/or by (example of valued action) _____,
etc.

and

I also value being a _____,
by (example of valued action) _____,
and/or by (example of valued action) _____,
and/or by (example of valued action) _____,
etc.

and

I also value being a _____,
by (example of valued action) _____,
and/or by (example of valued action) _____,
and/or by (example of valued action) _____,
etc.

Performance Mission Statement:

Your Final Performance Mission Statement:

EXERCISE: Specifying Your Performance-Related Goals

Now you can practice translating your valued actions into goals. In the spaces below, please specify your performance-related goals by first writing your Performance Mission Statement and isolating the valued action. Then, answer the three questions to help bring your performance-related goal to light, and write it down at the end once you've clarified it.

Your Performance Mission Statement:

Isolate your valued action here: _____

1) How can I make this valued action more concrete?

2) How can I measure this valued action?

3) How will I know if/when I've achieved this goal?

My Performance-Related Goal:

EXERCISE: Identifying Your Performance Barriers and How You Can Cope with Them

Now you can identify your own performance barriers and how you can cope with them. In the spaces below, first write your Performance Mission Statement and your performance-related goal. Then, write down the performance barrier(s) that may interfere with your commitment to engage in actions consistent with your Performance Mission Statement(s) and performance-related goal(s), and also write down the ACT skills (or others) that will help you to cope with the barrier(s) so you can continue performing.

For your convenience, we've made a single page you can use to include your performance barriers and how you can cope with them, in addition to your Performance Mission Statement and your Performance-Related Goal. If you need more space for additional Performance Mission Statements, performance-Related Goals, barriers and how to cope with them, please use the additional pages provided.

My Performance Mission Statement:

My Performance-Related Goal:

My Performance Barriers:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

How I Can Cope with Them (Using ACT Skills or Other Skills):

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

My Performance Mission Statement:

My Performance-Related Goal:

My Performance Barriers:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

How I Can Cope with Them (Using ACT Skills or Other Skills):

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

My Performance Mission Statement:

My Performance-Related Goal:

My Performance Barriers:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

How I Can Cope with Them (Using ACT Skills or Other Skills):

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

My Performance Mission Statement:

My Performance-Related Goal:

My Performance Barriers:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

How I Can Cope with Them (Using ACT Skills or Other Skills):

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

EXERCISE: Create Your Own Technique(s) that Combines Engaging in Valued Actions with Demonstrating Artistic Presence

Now you have an idea of how the left- and right-half Hexaflex skills can be combined into a technique for use during performances, we invite you to create your own technique, or set of techniques, you could remember to use during your performances. In order to do this, you'll want to pick a valued action(s) from your Performance Mission Statement you'd like to engage in during your performances, as you did in Chapter 7. Next, create a goal from the valued action by making it concrete, measurable, and have an end point, so you'll know you've achieved it, like you did in Chapter 8. Then, identify the performance barriers you'll encounter and which left-half (or right-half) Hexaflex skills you'll use to cope with them, also as you did in Chapter 8.

If you have more than one valued action you'd like to engage in during your performances, creating a second technique (or more) would be helpful. A set of techniques can truly broaden your behavioral repertoire and add more dimensionality to your performances.

If you're unable to do this, don't worry - it can be difficult. Use the two samples as a guide. You also may want to consider working with an ACT trained practitioner to help with this exercise.

Sample Technique 1: "The Teaching Technique" (Juncos & Markman, 2015)

1) Performance Mission Statement: *"I value being an effective music teacher."*

2) Valued action to engage in during performance: *"I value being an effective music teacher, by using effective communication skills to teach how to play key parts in a song."*

3a) Performance goal: Concrete
"Using effective communication skills means explaining verbally & demonstrating non-verbally on my instrument how to play key parts in the song."

3b) Performance goal: Measurable
"By preparing 3-5 'teaching moments' in a song for me to explain & demonstrate to a student, but rather than share them with an actual student, I will share them aloud with my ACT practitioner as if he were my student."

3c) Performance goal: Have an end point for achieving goal
"By practicing this behavior in front of my practitioner and eliciting feedback to help further refine what I'm doing - when I can do this silently during my performances, I'll know I achieved my goal."

4) Performance barriers & ACT skills that will help me cope:
***Worry about making a mistake** - Mindfully observe it, label it "task-irrelevant" & redirect attention back to engaging in Teaching Technique*

***Physiological anxiety sensations** - Mindfully accept & choose to not respond to them, redirect attention back to engaging in Teaching Technique*

Sample Technique 2: “The Emotional Expression Technique” (Juncos et al., 2017)

1) Performance Mission Statement: *“I value being an expressive vocalist.”*

2) Valued action to engage in during performance: *“I value being an expressive vocalist, by gesturing key emotional moments in the song.”*

3a) Performance goal: Concrete

“By using my arm movements and facial expressions together, to gesture key emotional moments in the song, I will portray what the composer intended to express.”

3b) Performance goal: Measurable

“By preparing gestures for 3-5 ‘expressive moments’ in a song, I will video-record myself doing them, and/or have my practitioner observe them live. I’ll pay attention to my practitioner’s/my video’s feedback when performing them next.”

3c) Performance goal: Have an end point for achieving goal

“By video-recording myself engaging in these gestures, I will pay attention to my internal reactions in response to watching them. When I get excited watching myself do them, and/or when I see my practitioner get excited, I’ll know to include that gesture(s) in my performance.”

4) Performance barriers & ACT skills that will help me cope:

Worry about gesturing “wrong” - *Remain willing to make mistakes when I gesture, redirect attention back to engaging in Emotional Expression Technique*

Feeling embarrassed - *Mindfully accept & choose to not respond to it, redirect attention back to engaging in Emotional Expression Technique*

Your Technique #1:

1) Performance Mission Statement:

2) Valued action to engage in during performance:

3a) Performance goal: Concrete

3b) Performance goal: Measurable

3c) Performance goal: Have an end point for achieving goal

4) Performance barriers & ACT skills that will help me cope:

Your Technique #2 or more (copy if needed):

1) Performance Mission Statement:

2) Valued action to engage in during performance:

3a) Performance goal: Concrete

3b) Performance goal: Measurable

3c) Performance goal: *Have an end point for achieving goal*

4) Performance barriers & ACT skills that will help me cope:

EXERCISE: Track & Manage Your Persistent Inflexible Behaviors/Performance Barriers

Example:

Inflexible behavior - *Worrying about making mistakes in upcoming performance*

Inflexahex process(es) it belongs to - *Mindlessness, avoidance, fusion*

On what day/days did the behavior occur in past week? (circle each day that applies)

Mon Tues Wed Thurs Fri Sat Sun

What Hexaflex process(es) would help? *Mindfulness meditation, Acceptance of Performance-Related Thoughts & Feelings exercise, defusion techniques*

On what day/days did you use helpful Hexaflex process(es)? (circle each day that applies)

Mon Tues Wed Thurs Fri Sat Sun

What progress, if any, have you made in coping with your performance barriers?

n/a

If you didn't use any helpful Hexaflex process(es), what prevented you? If you're stuck in not using a helpful Hexaflex process, is there another Inflexahex process to explain your stuckness?

Now that I think about it, I am unwilling to accept mistakes. So, I am stuck in attempts to avoid them. That's why I only practiced a mindfulness meditation once, on Sunday. I need to increase my willingness to make mistakes, and then I can use mindfulness & defusion to help better cope with the thought/worry of making a mistake.

What is the cost for not using a helpful Hexaflex process(es)?

I will continue to be afraid to make mistakes, and the worry will interfere with my performance, which ironically makes it more likely I'll make a mistake.

Exercise:

Inflexible behavior - _____

Inflexahex process(es) it belongs to - _____

On what day/days did the behavior occur in past week? (circle each day that applies)

Mon Tues Wed Thurs Fri Sat Sun

What Hexaflex process(es) would help? _____

On what day/days did you use helpful Hexaflex process(es)? (circle each day that applies)

Mon Tues Wed Thurs Fri Sat Sun

What progress, if any, have you made in coping with your performance barriers? _____

If you didn't use any helpful Hexaflex process(es), what prevented you? If you're stuck in not using a helpful Hexaflex process, is there another Inflexahex process to explain your stuckness?

What is the cost for not using a helpful Hexaflex process(es)?

Exercise:

Inflexible behavior - _____

Inflexahex process(es) it belongs to - _____

On what day/days did the behavior occur in past week? (circle each day that applies) _____

Mon Tues Wed Thurs Fri Sat Sun

What Hexaflex process(es) would help? _____

On what day/days did you use helpful Hexaflex process(es)? (circle each day that applies) _____

Mon Tues Wed Thurs Fri Sat Sun

What progress, if any, have you made in coping with your performance barriers? _____

If you didn't use any helpful Hexaflex process(es), what prevented you? If you're stuck in not using a helpful Hexaflex process, is there another Inflexahex process to explain your stuckness?

What is the cost for not using a helpful Hexaflex process(es)?

Exercise:

Inflexible behavior - _____

Inflexahex process(es) it belongs to - _____

On what day/days did the behavior occur in past week? (circle each day that applies) _____

Mon Tues Wed Thurs Fri Sat Sun

What Hexaflex process(es) would help? _____

On what day/days did you use helpful Hexaflex process(es)? (circle each day that applies) _____

Mon Tues Wed Thurs Fri Sat Sun

What progress, if any, have you made in coping with your performance barriers? _____

If you didn't use any helpful Hexaflex process(es), what prevented you? If you're stuck in not using a helpful Hexaflex process, is there another Inflexahex process to explain your stuckness?

What is the cost for not using a helpful Hexaflex process(es)?

EXERCISE: Use the SUDS Rating Scale to Rate Your MPA

Now that you have an idea how to use the SUDS rating scale, take a few minutes to rate the severity of your MPA during your most recent 3-5 performances.

Performance Type _____ **SUDS Rating** _____

Performance Type _____ **SUDS Rating** _____

Performance Type _____ **SUDS Rating** _____

Performance Type _____ **SUDS Rating** _____

Performance Type _____ **SUDS Rating** _____

Average SUDS Rating = _____

EXERCISE: Use the Triple Vulnerabilities Model to Trace the Development of Your MPA

Learning Barlow's Triple Vulnerabilities Model can greatly enhance your understanding of how your MPA, or your client/student's MPA, came to be problematic. Use the previous and next case example of MPA to help guide you to uncover each of your own vulnerabilities. Don't worry if you can't get this exercise exactly right, just give it your best shot!

New case example - a young, female singer went off to study voice at a reputable university. She had a genetic predisposition towards neuroticism and behavioral inhibition, aka shyness. Her friends and family had described her as a worrier since she was a child. During her first year of university training, she was told she was by more than one professor she was "too inhibited and boring" while singing. These were mortifying experiences for her. As a result, she started to dread future performances not only in front of teachers, but in front of her peers, because she worried she'd appear too boring. She also tended to over-monitor herself while performing, as a way of ensuring she wasn't coming across too boring. Unfortunately, this would backfire because she wasn't fully engaged in her performances, which made her teachers continue to judge her performances negatively, as she was being too aloof.

Generalized Biological Vulnerability: _____ neuroticism, behavioral inhibition (shyness) _____

Generalized Psychological Vulnerability: _____ worry _____

Specific Psychological Vulnerability: _____ being told "too boring" (stressful life event) _____

_____ anxious apprehension about appearing boring _____

_____ believing being boring was a threat to be avoided _____

Now, you apply Barlow's model to your own case of MPA. First, write out a story that traces the development of your MPA. Then, highlight each vulnerability like we did in the previous two case examples:

Your case:

Generalized Biological Vulnerability: _____

Generalized Psychological Vulnerability: _____

Specific Psychological Vulnerability: _____ (stressful life event)

_____ anxious apprehension about _____

_____ believing _____ is a threat to be avoided

If you struggled to do the previous exercise, a simpler way of tracing the development of your MPA is to ask yourself (or your client/student) these three questions:

- 1. What do I fear? (whatever you are anxiously apprehending will reveal your fear)**
- 2. Was there a life stressor or event that conditioned that fear?**
- 3. What belief(s) perpetuates the fear?**

EXERCISE: Using Exposure Therapy Tasks to Increase Acceptance of MPA Symptoms

When starting exposure therapy work, you'll first want to generate a list of your most troublesome MPA symptoms, whether they are physiological or cognitive, or both. Next, you'll want to share this list with your psychologist so they can help determine which exposure tasks to do with you, in order to produce those feared MPA symptoms. Certain exposure therapy tasks produce uncomfortable physiological symptoms, whereas other tasks produce unwanted cognitive symptoms. You and your psychologist should choose the task(s) that best mimics your most feared MPA symptom(s). Lastly, you'll want to immerse yourself *fully* in these tasks, without any avoidance. Avoiding the experience will prevent you from correctly learning the symptoms are not dangerous.

Here is a list of common exposure therapy tasks and the symptoms they can produce:

1) Hyperventilating: Light-headedness, dizziness, shortness of breath

By quickly breathing in through the nose and out through the mouth, at a rate of about one breath for every one second, going for 30 seconds first and pausing for 1-2 minutes to observe sensations, then going again for 60 seconds & pausing to observe, then 90 seconds, and then 120 seconds, you can induce sensations of light-headedness, dizziness, and shortness of breath. If you're unable to proceed at **any** point during this exercise please stop immediately. This exercise may induce panic attacks and dissociative symptoms in certain individuals, which is why we recommend only doing it under guidance of a trained psychologist. If you have a medical condition that may interfere with the exercise, e.g., asthma, please consult with a medical doctor beforehand to ensure you're healthy enough for it.

When pausing to observe your sensation(s), use the same script from the "Mindfulness of the Body" meditation. Notice first its location, what it is, its strength, its pleasantness, its duration, and if it spreads or stays in one spot. Give a SUDS rating before/after this exercise to track any changes in your anxiety.

2) Breathing through a coffee stirrer: Shortness of breath, smothering sensations

Hold one end of a coffee stirrer (or thin straw) in between your lips, and while pinching your nostrils together, breathe slowly through it for 30 seconds, then pause and observe the sensations. If you're willing to go again, breathe through it for 60 seconds now, then pause again to observe, then go for 90 seconds, then for 120 seconds. Doing so will induce sensations of shortness of breath and a feeling of being smothered. Try doing this while walking back and forth slowly in a room, or while walking up/down stairs in your house to *really* induce shortness of breath and smothering sensations. If you're unable to proceed at **any** point during this exercise please stop immediately. FYI - this exercise may also provoke a fear reaction, given that it limits your ability to breathe properly. Again, if you have a medical condition that may interfere with the exercise, e.g., asthma, please consult with a medical doctor beforehand to ensure you're healthy enough for it.

When pausing to observe your sensation(s), use the same script as before. Notice first its location, what it is, its strength, its pleasantness, its duration, and if it spreads or stays in one spot. Notice also any thoughts your mind produces about what you're doing, e.g., "*This is dangerous,*" "*I need to breathe right now.*" See if you can allow those thoughts to be present, while also using their presence to inform your decision to engage further or to stop the task. You are always in control of that decision. Give a SUDS rating before/after this exercise to track any changes in your anxiety.

3) Holding an ice pack in both hands: Coldness, pain

Using an athlete's ice pack (or a bag of ice cubes), start by holding it in your right hand for 30 seconds at a time, then pause to observe sensations, then switch to your left hand and hold for 30 seconds, then pause again to observe sensations. If you're willing to continue, hold it in your right hand for 60 seconds then pause to observe, then switch again to left hand and hold it for 60 seconds. If you're willing to continue even further, extend to 90 or 120 seconds in each hand and pause to observe sensations. If you're unable to proceed at **any** point during this exercise please stop immediately. Again, if you have a medical condition that may interfere with the exercise, e.g., chronic pain, please consult with a medical doctor beforehand to ensure you're healthy enough for it.

When pausing to observe your sensations, use the same script as before. Notice first its location, what it is, its strength, its pleasantness, its duration, and if it spreads or stays in one spot. Notice also what your mind says about the sensations and allow those thoughts to be part of the experience. Give a SUDS rating before/after this exercise to track any changes in your anxiety, if you experienced anxiety.

4) Staring at yourself in a mirror: Self-consciousness, embarrassment, derealization, shame

For those musicians who are more prone to experience self-conscious emotions like embarrassment or shame while performing, we recommend this exercise. Here, you'll want to find a full length mirror and sit in front of it. Now, stare at yourself in the mirror for 2 minutes, then pause to observe any sensations and/or emotional discomfort. If you're willing to continue, stare at yourself for another 2 minutes then pause to observe. Keep staring longer if you're willing to. If you're unable to proceed at **any** point during this exercise please stop immediately. If you can do this in front of others, it can heighten self-consciousness further.

When pausing to observe your sensation(s), use the same script as before. Notice first its location, what it is, its strength, its pleasantness, its duration, and if it spreads or stays in one spot. Notice also what your mind says about the sensations and allow those thoughts to be part of the experience. You may experience evaluative thoughts about s during this exercise too. Like with other thoughts, allow them to be part of your experience. Give a SUDS rating before/after this exercise to track any changes in your anxiety.

Below are some other exposure tasks and the sensations/experiences they can produce. Again, we recommend consulting first with a medical doctor to ensure you're healthy enough for this work, and working with a trained psychologist, *especially* when doing any exposure task(s) designed to re-create traumatic performance experiences, due to the potential for an extreme or decompensatory reaction.

- *Drinking coffee: Alertness, jitteriness, racing thoughts, palpitations*
- *Spinning in a chair: Dizziness, vertigo*
- *Describing a memory or mental image associated with a performance trauma: Numbness, dissociation, flashbacks, feelings of shame, guilt*

Now, select the most feared MPA symptom(s) from your list and share which exposure therapy task(s) you'll use to increase your ability to accept those symptoms, under the guidance of your psychologist. Every time you engage in an exposure task, use this sample guide:

Sample MPA symptom(s): cold hands

Exposure task to produce symptom(s): holding ice pack in both hands

SUDS rating before exposure task (0-100): 60 **SUDS after task:** 10

Time engaged in task: 10 minutes (5 minutes for each hand)

Willingness to experience symptom(s) before task (0-100): 20 **Willingness after:** 80

Struggle with symptom(s) before task (0-100): 60 **Struggle after:** 10

What I observed about the symptom(s): At first, I was struggling to be with the extreme sensations of coldness in both hands, and I wanted to stop after 20 seconds. However, when I became more curious about the sensations, I noticed they weren't so unpleasant after all. It was still cold as I went along, but I didn't struggle as much with feeling that way anymore. I wound up holding the ice pack in both hands for 5 minutes total!

MPA symptom(s): _____

Exposure task to produce symptom(s): _____

SUDS rating before exposure task (0-100): _____ **SUDS after task:** _____

Time engaged in task: _____

Willingness to experience symptom(s) before task (0-100): _____ **Willingness after:** _____

Struggle with symptom(s) before task (0-100): _____ **Struggle after:** _____

What I observed about the symptom(s): _____

MPA symptom(s): _____

Exposure task to produce symptom(s): _____

SUDS rating before exposure task (0-100): _____ **SUDS after task:** _____

Time engaged in task: _____

Willingness to experience symptom(s) before task (0-100): _____ **Willingness after:** _____

Struggle with symptom(s) before task (0-100): _____ **Struggle after:** _____

What I observed about the symptom(s): _____

EXERCISE: Track Your Barriers to Increasing Willingness to Perform with MPA Present

Example:

MPA barrier(s) - Overtly avoiding solos and auditions, fusion with belief that “making mistakes is bad”

Inflexahex process(es) it belongs to - Avoidance, Fusion

On what day/days did the barrier(s) occur in past week? (circle each day that applies)

Overt avoidance of solos: N/A

Fusion with belief that “making mistakes is bad”:

Mon Tues Wed Thurs Fri Sat Sun

What Hexaflex skills would help? Acceptance of Performance-Related Thoughts and Feelings exercise, Defusion techniques

On what day/days did you use helpful Hexaflex skills? (circle each day that applies)

Mon Tues Wed Thurs Fri Sat Sun

What progress, if any, have you made in coping with your MPA barriers?

I’ve used defusion techniques on weekends, even though I think I was fused everyday

If you didn’t use any helpful Hexaflex skills, what prevented you? If you’re stuck in not using a helpful Hexaflex process, is there another Inflexahex process to explain your stuckness?

When I was by myself in the practice room over the weekend, I used defusion techniques to help disentangle myself from my belief that making mistakes is bad. However, during the week I struggled to remember to defuse, and I also don’t want to give up this belief fully. Part of me thinks it’s true. I suppose I’m stuck in trying to avoid making mistakes. I’ve always been a perfectionist and I often focus on avoiding making mistakes.

What is the cost for not using a helpful Hexaflex process(es)?

I will continue to be afraid to make mistakes, and the worry will interfere with my performance, which ironically makes it more likely I’ll make a mistake. I suppose I need to become more willing to make mistakes.

Exercise:

MPA barrier(s) - _____

Inflexahex process(es) it belongs to - _____

On what day/days did the barrier(s) occur in past week? (circle each day that applies)

Mon Tues Wed Thurs Fri Sat Sun

What Hexaflex skills would help? _____

On what day/days did you use helpful Hexaflex process(es)? (circle each day that applies)

Mon Tues Wed Thurs Fri Sat Sun

What progress, if any, have you made in coping with your MPA barriers? _____

If you didn't use any helpful Hexaflex process(es), what prevented you? If you're stuck in not using a helpful Hexaflex process, is there another Inflexahex process to explain your stuckness?

What is the cost for not using a helpful Hexaflex process(es)? _____

Exercise:

MPA barrier(s) - _____

Inflexahex process(es) it belongs to - _____

On what day/days did the barrier(s) occur in past week? (circle each day that applies)

Mon Tues Wed Thurs Fri Sat Sun

What Hexaflex skills would help? _____

On what day/days did you use helpful Hexaflex process(es)? (circle each day that applies)

Mon Tues Wed Thurs Fri Sat Sun

What progress, if any, have you made in coping with your MPA barriers? _____

If you didn't use any helpful Hexaflex process(es), what prevented you? If you're stuck in not using a helpful Hexaflex process, is there another Inflexahex process to explain your stuckness?

What is the cost for not using a helpful Hexaflex process(es)? _____

Exercise:

MPA barrier(s) - _____

Inflexahex process(es) it belongs to - _____

On what day/days did the barrier(s) occur in past week? (circle each day that applies)

Mon Tues Wed Thurs Fri Sat Sun

What Hexaflex skills would help?

On what day/days did you use helpful Hexaflex process(es)? (circle each day that applies)

Mon Tues Wed Thurs Fri Sat Sun

What progress, if any, have you made in coping with your MPA barriers?

If you didn't use any helpful Hexaflex process(es), what prevented you? If you're stuck in not using a helpful Hexaflex process, is there another Inflexahex process to explain your stuckness?

What is the cost for not using a helpful Hexaflex process(es)?

MPA symptom(s): _____

Exposure task to produce symptom(s): _____

SUDS rating before exposure task (0-100): _____ **SUDS after task:** _____

Time engaged in task: _____

Willingness to experience symptom(s) before task (0-100): _____ **Willingness after:** _____

Struggle with symptom(s) before task (0-100): _____ **Struggle after:** _____

What I observed about the symptom(s): _____

MPA symptom(s): _____

Exposure task to produce symptom(s): _____

SUDS rating before exposure task (0-100): _____ **SUDS after task:** _____

Time engaged in task: _____

Willingness to experience symptom(s) before task (0-100): _____ **Willingness after:** _____

Struggle with symptom(s) before task (0-100): _____ **Struggle after:** _____

What I observed about the symptom(s): _____

Similar to what you did in Chapter 4, please write down your most common ways of coping with pain (chronic/disabling or not), during your practice, performances, or at other times, using the categories provided. Again, “attempts to control” means any attempt to control the pain sensations *while they are occurring*, including attempts to escape from it. “Attempts to avoid” means any attempt to avoid the pain *before it occurs*. See the examples for further clarification.

ATTEMPTS TO AVOID

Example - Avoid performing when pain

is too unbearable

Example - Avoid practice when pain is

is too unbearable

Example - Limit repertoire so I don't

have to experience pain

[illegible]

ATTEMPTS TO CONTROL

<i>have to experience pain</i>	20%
--------------------------------	-----

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Lastly, when you are done writing down your percentages, please add them all up (using numbers from both columns) and calculate the average percentage number for all of your coping skills. Once you have that number, ask yourself the following questions - *Is that average effectiveness number worth it for me? Are there any unintended costs associated with engaging in these attempts to cope with my pain?* If so, please go back and write down the costs associated with each attempt to control or avoid discomfort on the blank lines on the previous page.

Using the previous examples, here is what we would learn from those attempts to cope:

On average, those attempts to control and avoid pain are about **43% effective** ($70 + 80 + 50 + 30 + 30 + 20 + 20 = 300$, $300/7 = 42.86$ or 43%). 43% may be worth it to some, but not to others, because it implies your copings skills are working less than half of the time.

Unlike in Chapter 4, you'll notice your attempts to *control* your discomfort (not including attempts to avoid) with these numbers are slightly better than average at **58% effective** ($70 + 80 + 50 + 30 = 230$, $230/4 = 57.5$ or 58%). However, this number may not be as high as you'd hope, *and* there are likely unintended costs to these attempts to control pain (see below).

Here are some possible unintended costs to using those sample coping skills:

"Taking an OTC drug may reduce my pain some of the time, but if I take it regularly it may become less effective."

"Taking a prescription drug may also reduce my pain, but again, if I take it regularly it may become less effective, or worse, I may become dependent on it."

"Drinking alcohol may also reduce my pain, but again, it can lose its effectiveness over time, and I may become dependent on it. Also, I don't want to drink during a performance, because I won't be as alert, which will affect my playing."

"Deep breathing may help to relax me when I'm experiencing pain, but it doesn't get rid of it."

"Avoiding performing when pain is too unbearable may lessen the pain somewhat during the time I'm not performing, but this will interfere with my performances if done regularly."

"Avoiding practice when pain is too unbearable may also lessen the pain somewhat during the time I should be practicing, but this will not only interfere with my practice if done regularly, it may also limit my ability to learn the music I have to perform."

"Limiting repertoire so I don't have to experience pain may also lessen my pain, but I don't want to allow pain to take over my life like that. I prefer to decide the repertoire I want to perform, rather than allow my pain to decide for me."

Like in Chapter 4, if your average effectiveness number was lower than you'd like, and/or if some or all of your coping skills have created any unintended costs for you in the long term, then please ask yourself - *Are your pain coping skills bringing you closer to the performer or person you want to be, or are they pulling you further away and possibly adding to your suffering?* While it's certainly possible some of your pain coping skills may be healthy and have little to no long term costs, e.g., taking medication works to treat occasional pain, it is also likely this exercise led you to believe your coping skills may actually be less helpful than you thought, and/or they may be adding to your suffering and interfering with your functioning. If so, we

invite you to consider increasing your acceptance of chronic pain as an alternative to making attempts to control or avoid it.

ADAPTED EXERCISE: Compassionate Letter Writing to Increase Your Acceptance of a Difficult Performance-Related Experience

The following exercise is an adaptation of several compassion-based exercises in Paul Gilbert's (2010) book *Compassion Focused Therapy*, i.e., Soothing Breathing Rhythm, Creating a Safe Place, Creating a Compassionate Ideal, and Compassionate Letter Writing. These exercises have shown to increase activity in the *Soothing and Contentment System*. Before starting, set aside a pen and piece of paper, which you'll later use to write down information that will aid you in this exercise.

1) First, we'll ask you to engage in a brief mindfulness meditation, which will enable you to find a breathing rhythm that soothes you.

Start by sitting upright in your chair with wakeful posture, with your feet flat on the floor, your arms and legs uncrossed, hands resting in your lap either palms up or down, with your head, neck and spine aligned and lifted up towards the sky... If this is uncomfortable, please assume a different seated position until you're more comfortable.

When you're ready, close your eyes, or if you prefer to keep them open, just fix them on an object on the floor in front of you... Allow yourself to have a gentle facial expression that embodies kindness, like a slight smile... .. Begin by just noticing your breath the way it is, without attempting to control it... Spend about one minute just observing how you are breathing... .. If your breath is shallow, let it be shallow... Simply observe it without needing to change it... Place one hand on your chest, and the other on your belly..., to help you further detect where your breathing occurs... .. If your breath is still shallow, you'll feel it more in your chest... Try and drop your breath down into your belly, if you don't feel it there already... .. Let's run an experiment - breathe a little faster than normal... .. you'll likely feel your breath more in your chest... Then breathe a little slower than normal... .. you'll likely feel it in your belly... Then, find a breathing rhythm that is natural for you... .. This natural rhythm is your own... it's your breath at rest... .. Don't change your breathing, simply observe it the way it is. Keep breathing at this rhythm for another two minutes... .. Usually, your breath will become slower and deeper the more you let it be... If this isn't the case yet, drop your breath down into your belly again... and make sure your breaths are about the same length... 3 seconds in ... hold for a second... then 3 seconds out... hold for another second... and repeat this pattern for 30 seconds... .. then let your breath return to its natural rhythm... ..

When you allow yourself to breathe how you naturally do, and when you are in sync with this rhythm, your breath becomes a source of soothing and calmness for you. This will create a feeling of safety.

2) Now that you're feeling safe, we'll ask you to think of a difficult experience you've had as a professional or student musician. It could be suffering with MPA, receiving a negative evaluation of your performance by a teacher or the press, making a mistake during a recent performance, dealing with a painful injury, etc. Also, you'll want to include a brief description of your emotional distress related to this experience. When you have it, please write it below. We'll use the example of a student musician receiving a negative evaluation by their teacher.

Sample experience - receiving a negative evaluation of my performance by my teacher. I feel embarrassed for not performing as well as my teacher thought I should've performed. I feel

ashamed for not being as prepared as I could've been. I'm also nervous to return to my next lesson with my teacher.

3) When you have the experience in mind, now we'll ask you to imagine a kind person whom you'd wish to have an honest conversation with about this difficult experience. We'll call this person your "compassionate guide." It could be someone like your partner, a parent, a good friend, your therapist, a teacher, or an imagined person. When picking a guide, make sure they have qualities you'd want in a compassionate person whom you'll confide in, i.e., wise, understanding, patient, knowledgeable, kind, warm, gentle, strong, having your best interest in mind, etc. Try and include any sensory qualities about your guide into your image of them too, e.g., like their tone of voice, their smile, what color their clothing is, the way they talk, a prominent physical feature of theirs, etc. If you're imagining someone not real, imagine your guide having a soft tone of voice and a gentle manner, and them being patient and non-judgmental of you. Imagine also how you'd like them to relate to you, and how you'd like to relate to them, and imagine them genuinely wanting you to be free from suffering.

Imagine having the conversation in a safe place too, where you'll feel totally safe and unencumbered. It could be fictional, like a scene in a beautiful forest in which you're seated next to your guide on a large tree stump. Or it could be real, like a summer's day at your favorite beach, with your guide seated next to you on a beach chair. When you pick a place, try and add details from multiple senses so you'll feel more immersed in this experience (sights, sounds, smells, tastes, things you touch).

Write down who your guide is and where's a safe place for your conversation:

Sample place - my best friend and I are seated at my favorite beach. It's a perfect summer's day, and there are children playing in the sand close to me. I feel the sunlight gently warming my skin, and I can smell the salty air around me. I can feel my toes dipping into the sand, as I lay back in my chair and relax. I hear the waves crashing in the distance and the sounds of people splashing one another.

Sample guide - My best friend is listening attentively to me as I discuss how upset I am about my teacher's last evaluation of my performance. She is occasionally asking me to pause so she can make sure she's understood me, like she always does. Her tone of voice is gentle and she's wearing a blue shirt, which matches the sky.

Safe Place:

Your Guide:

4) Now, we invite you to write down, in a letter format *to yourself*, some soothing things you'd like to hear from your guide, *written from the perspective of your compassionate guide*. In order to do this, you'll want to make sure your letter includes some of the following qualities, according to Gilbert's recommendations (2010):

- It expresses concern and genuine caring for you.
- It is sensitive to your emotional distress, which you've already written down.
- It is sympathetic and responds emotionally to your distress.
- It helps you face your difficult feelings and become more accepting of them.
- It helps you become more understanding of and reflective of your feelings, dilemmas, and difficulties.
- It is non-judgmental.
- The letter exudes a genuine sense of warmth, understanding, and caring.
- It helps you think about the behavior(s) you might need to learn in order to grow.

It's also important your letter isn't simply a string of complaints about yourself, nor is it filled with admonishing advice (Gilbert, 2010). Rather, it should focus on your difficult feelings, encourage you to reflect on them and accept them, and develop a compassionate and balanced way of working with them. Remember, you don't want to view these feelings as threats or problems to overcome. Doing so will activate the threat-detecting mode and/or the drive-excitement mode. Truly activating the soothing-contentment mode requires following Gilbert's recommendations. After reading our sample letter, please write your own letter. Don't

worry if it doesn't make you feel better yet. Like any new skill, it takes time and practice to get it to work.

Dear (insert your name here):

Well, things have been harder for you now, ever since your teacher gave you that tough evaluation, haven't they? I'm so sorry you had to experience that, especially given the performance itself was hard enough on you, with all that preparing and making sure you hit on all the things your teacher wanted. I totally understand why you'd want to avoid going to your lesson now, I'd probably do the same. It's probably hard to remember now just how many of your peers also struggle with satisfying their teachers' expectations in their performances. I wonder if it'd be helpful if you talked it over with one or two of them though? You usually do better when you connect with others who are also facing a similar difficulty, and I've seen you bring yourself to do it before. Maybe if you reach out to an upperclassmen who's already been through it with this same teacher, that might help you see you're not alone in this, which could provide some relief. That might help you feel more confident going into your next lesson? Of course, I understand if you're not feeling up to doing that yet. Sometimes we need to wait until we're ready to take those steps. I hope you feel better soon.

Sincerely,

Your compassionate guide

Now it's your turn to practice writing your compassionate letter. First, spend a few minutes engaging in soothing breathing to put yourself into a more soothed state of mind. Then, when you're ready, write your letter to yourself.

Dear ()::

[illegible]

Sincerely,
Your compassionate guide

5) Lastly, you'll want to read your letter aloud to yourself to practice talking to yourself in a compassionate manner. When doing so, deliberately slow down your speech and adopt a gentle tone of voice. Also, adopt any other of your compassion guide's qualities you'd like, to help you further benefit from this exercise. With repeated practice, you'll start to adopt this way of talking to yourself more when you're dealing with future difficulties.

EXERCISE: Getting Back to the Present Moment in One Minute or Less

1) STOP

Stand up and breathe. Feel your connection to the earth.

Tune into your body. Scan your body and notice physical sensations or emotions. Breathe in any unpleasant sensations, emotions or feelings. Make room for them and just notice what happens when you breathe out.

Observe. Open your eyes and take in your surroundings. Focus on something in your environment that is pleasant and be grateful for it.

Possibility. Ask yourself what is possible, what is new or what is a forward step.

2) Take 10 Breaths

Becoming mindful of and slowing down your breath is always a powerful way to re-center yourself, and it can be done at any time. If you can't manage 10 long breaths, do it only five times.

1. Take 10 slow, deep breaths. Focus on breathing out as slowly as possible until the lungs are completely empty - and then allow them to refill by themselves.
2. Notice the sensations of your lungs emptying. Notice them refilling. Notice your rib cage rising and falling. Notice the gentle rise and fall of your shoulders.
3. See if you can let your thoughts come and go as if they're just passing cars, driving past your house.
4. Expand your awareness: simultaneously notice your breathing and your body. Then look around the room and notice what you can see, hear, smell, touch, and feel.

3) Notice Five Things

Another way to center yourself is to engage with your environment. This exercise is especially useful when you find yourself getting caught up in your thoughts and feelings.

1. Pause for a moment.
2. Look around and notice five things that you can see.
3. Then, listen carefully and notice five things that you can hear.
4. Now, notice five things that you can feel in contact with your body.

For example: your watch against your wrist, your pants against your legs, the air on your face, your feet upon the floor, your back against the chair.

5. Finally, do all of the above simultaneously (one thing you can see, hear, touch, followed by another thing you can see, hear, touch, etc.)

EXERCISE: Mindful Breathing & Body Warm-Up

Starting with your arms alongside your body, stretch your arms forward and lift them up high breathing in through your nose. Before breathing out, stretch as high as you can and then move your arms out sideways, still not exhaling yet, and now reach out sideways as far as you can - still not exhaling yet - as if both arms were being pulled to the side. Then breathe out forcefully through your mouth - while still reaching to the sides with your arms - and make a strong “FF” (or “SS”) sound, letting your arms fall to your sides slowly now. Breathe out really strongly and imagine you are evacuating all that isn’t useful for your upcoming lesson.

Repeat three times.

Don’t hesitate to close your eyes to really focus on your breath and the sensations in your body.

*Now do the same exercise in the reverse direction. Starting with the arms alongside your body, lift them up backwards this time, and open your chest wide, pushing your arms first up backwards and then up towards the ceiling while you're still breathing in. Stretch your arms upwards as high as you can with full lungs, your chest stretched up and high. Breathe out with a strong “FF” (or “SS”) while you lower your outstretched arms **forward** and then downwards, reaching as far as you can. Feel the stretch in your shoulders and shoulder blades.*

Repeat three times.

This exercise is great to relieve shoulder tension, and it allows you to reconnect with your breath - allowing it be deeper while slowing its pace.

EXERCISE: Metaphor of the Curious Scientist for the Music Lesson

Music teacher:

“We’re now learning a difficult passage in the music, and I’m fully aware that you can’t do it yet quite as well as you’d like to. Let’s try to really focus on what we want to do right now with the music you’re playing. I’d like to invite you to really analyze and observe this passage, and mostly what you’re doing with your voice/instrument while trying to play/sing it. You can try to think of yourself as a curious and passionate scientist who is trying to discover something new and exciting.”

“Now let’s try to play/sing this one more time, and now I want you to really listen to the sound you are making. Truly listening means understanding what sounds like it’s working well and what isn’t, and knowing why or why not.”

Next, the student plays and then comments on whatever they noticed. They may say things like, “I cannot seem to play fast enough,” “The sound is not free enough,” “I keep on failing this note,” “The fingering doesn’t seem to be working,” etc. You, as the teacher, will get a clue of what the student is aware of that’s working well or what isn’t working for them (these things are akin to a scientist’s discoveries). You’ll then be able to guide them by offering some specific exercises they can do to improve the specific passage they’re working on. You can always invite your students to play or do specific exercises you’ve advised, while adopting this attitude of a curious scientist.

EXERCISE: Introducing Defusion and Acceptance when Giving Feedback

Music teacher:

"I notice you're looking upset. Perhaps it's because of the work we're doing right now that's difficult, or was it the feedback I just gave you? Can I ask you how you are feeling right now?"

Student:

"I'm just frustrated. I thought I was doing this better, but now you're telling me I'm not, and I just don't get why I'm still unable to do this. I've been working on the exercises you told me and I thought I had it, but apparently I'm still not getting this right."

Music teacher:

"Ok, so first of all, I want you to know it's completely understandable that you're upset right now and your reaction is very normal. I'm noticing you're particularly upset with this today. Let's just take a few seconds to breathe in and out a little bit and just let all this sink in, ok? (Wait for agreement here). Let's breathe in deeply... and out slowly... just a couple of times ..."

Ok, so now back to my feedback - I want to state again that if I'm telling you you're not quite there yet, and I'm pushing you further, it's because I know you can do this! If I thought you weren't able to, then it wouldn't make sense to work on this right now. I'm going to tell you again why I think this hasn't worked out exactly how I expected. Before I do so, I invite you to take this information in the most open and accepting way you can - try to make a lot of space for what I'm about to tell you. The frustration is all here, I know and I get it, I've been there too.

Ok, so let it be here now, and give it space. (Give your student's feedback again, explaining what went well and what didn't work). Now that I've told you again, notice the thoughts you're having... see if you can just observe them and see them for what they are: passing comments and evaluations of what is happening, like leaves on a stream of water. You see them passing but you're not trying to hold onto them, just let them go by...

Does what I just told you make sense? Do you think you're ready to work more on this, or is it too much for now, and you'd prefer to move on to something else?"

Student:

"Let's do this." (If the student says they'd prefer to move on, you can either agree to move on right away, or if you feel this is really important and that the student can manage it, tell them and ask again. If the student again doesn't feel ready it'd be counterproductive to try and force it now).

Music teacher:

"Now, again - let's focus on what is important for us (recall their keywords here), and let's try one more time. We can adopt the attitude of a curious scientist again to really be mindful, remember?"

Student:

"Ok, let's try."

Notice that throughout this conversation we didn't spend much time explaining that what we did was called "defusion" and "acceptance" and where these skills come from (ACT). If you find the time at some point and are confident about it, of course you can discuss the principles of ACT with them in some detail (increased psychological flexibility is the overall goal, this is done by improving the Hexaflex processes and minimizing the Inflexahex processes, etc.), and how you're planning to apply them in their lessons. But, this isn't necessary with most students, especially those who don't appear interested. Also, if it becomes clear a student is reacting negatively to your feedback due to not having practiced sufficiently, and it's hindering the progress you were expecting them to make, we recommend you help the student(s) with values identification and committed action, both of which are covered later in this chapter. You can also use the ACT Matrix exercise to help with that work.

EXERCISE: Getting Clear on Your Teaching Strengths and Limitations

What are my strengths as a music teacher? What qualities do I bring to the lesson as a person and as a musician?

Sample answer - I am very knowledgeable of technique for my instrument.

What can I bring to my students? What knowledge can I pass on to them?

Sample answer - I bring many years' experience as an orchestral musician and violin teacher, I am also compassionate with my students. I can prepare them to win an audition after school.

What makes my music lessons different and unique?

Sample answer - In addition to having extensive performance and teaching experience, I also try to incorporate evidence-based, performance psychology techniques into my lessons.

What do I still need to work on to improve my music lessons? What skills would I like to acquire and improve?

Sample answer - I would like more training in using ACT to treat MPA with my students.

ADAPTED EXERCISE: Creating a Flexible Sense of Self as a Music Teacher

1) Please write down any troubling thoughts or memories you recall now about a specific music lesson or about your teaching. If you can, please include any key words that cause you distress.

Example - *"I should've been able to help that student with this particular technical aspect he was struggling with."*

Key words - *should've been able to help, that student, struggling*

2) Now, read the following instructions below and answer any question you'd like about your troubling thoughts and memories.

*Are you able to see it as a thought? Are you able to notice you are the one having the thought? Do you realize you can observe these thoughts and memories passing through your mind, just like you observe what you wrote on this paper above? Your thoughts and memories are written on this paper, and you are separate from them, observing them. To strengthen this difference in perspective, you can say aloud "I am **here** (placing your hand on your chest), and my thoughts and memories are written **there on the paper** (pointing to them)," and also say "Just like, I am **here** (hand on chest), and my thoughts and memories are **there, in my mind** (pointing to your head)."*

Now, are these troubling thoughts and memories part of a story you often tell yourself? If so, what is the story about? Can you write a summary of the story below? Do your key words come up in the writing the story? If so, which ones?

Example - *"I'm not a good enough teacher," and "I'm a failure as teacher."*

Key words - *not good enough, failure*

Ask yourself - who is telling the story? Is it you? Or your mind? Are you able to notice it is your mind that tells the story, and not you? Also, can you notice your mind linking key words to your story, and how it is not you doing that? You are separate from your story and its key words. To strengthen this different perspective again, say aloud, "I am **here** (hand on chest) and my story is written **there on the paper** (points to it)," and also say "Just like, I am **here** (hand on chest) and my story is occurring **there, in my mind** (points to head)."

3) Next, please write down any unwanted emotions, sensations or urges you can recall now about your teaching. By urges, we mean an unwanted urge to say or do something.

Example - feeling like a failure, sad

Example - urge to judge myself negatively

Example - knot in my stomach and throat

4) Now, read these similar instructions below and answer any question you'd like about your unwanted emotions, sensations and urges in the spaces provided.

For each emotion, sensation, or urge you wrote, ask yourself - are you able to see it as an emotion, sensation, or urge? Who is the one having this emotion, sensation, or urge? Are you able to notice you are the one having the emotion, sensation, or urge? Do you realize you can observe these experiences pass through your mind and body, just like you observe what you wrote on this paper above? Your emotions, sensations, and urges are written on this paper, and you are separate from them, observing them. To strengthen this difference in perspective, you can say aloud, "I am **here** (hand on your chest), and my emotions, sensations, and urges are written **there on the paper** (pointing to them)," and also say "Just like, I am **here** (hand on chest), and my emotions, sensations, and urges are **there, in my body** (pointing to where they are felt in your body)."

Now, are these unwanted emotions, sensations, or urges part of your story from before? If so, what is the connection? Please write down the connection below.

Example - *I can see the connection of these current judgmental thoughts, painful feelings, and urges with my overall, limiting self-story of being a failure as a teacher.*

Ask yourself - who is making the connection to your story? Is it you? Or your mind? Are you able to notice it is your mind that connects these internal experiences to your story, and not you? Often times, those connections are made using key words too. It doesn't matter whether you are having troublesome thoughts, memories, emotions, sensations, or urges. Your mind will always connect those experiences to your larger story, without needing you to step in. Yet, you are separate from your story, and you are separate from the connections your mind is making to your story. To strengthen this difference again, say aloud, "I am **here** (hand on chest) and the connections my mind makes to my story are written **there, on the paper** (points to it)," and also say "Just like, I am **here** (hand on chest) and the connections my mind makes to my story are occurring **there, in my mind** (points to head)."

5) Lastly, read the instructions below and answer any question you'd like about how to flexibly respond to your troubling internal experiences in the spaces provided.

Recall a time when these troubling experiences got the best of you. Was it the same lesson or moment you recalled already? Or a different one? It doesn't matter, just recall when your troublesome thoughts, memories, emotions, sensations, or urges had that effect on you either before, during, or after a lesson. **Now, please take a mental picture of what you did when these internal experiences got the best of you.** Do you have that picture in mind? If yes, write down a word(s) below to describe what you are doing in that mental picture. Here are some examples:

Example - *I judged my value as a teacher.*

Example - *I avoided working on that technical aspect I feel insecure about.*

Now, imagine those troubling internal experiences are not only separate from you, but smaller than you. To help with this - imagine each of those experiences as an individual cloud in the sky, and you are the sky itself. Some clouds are small and pass relatively quickly, like certain thoughts or sensations, whereas others are much larger and stay longer, like certain emotions. Some clouds are seemingly always there, like your most lasting stories. However, they're all just

clouds... Are you able to notice how the sky is larger than the clouds? Similarly, can you see that you are bigger than your thoughts, memories, emotions, sensations, urges, and even your biggest and most troubling self-stories?

With this in mind, please **take another mental picture of how you'd act if that troubling thought, memory, emotion, sensation, urge, or story did NOT get the best of you.** In other words, what do you really want to do? Instead of letting these experiences take charge of you, how can YOU take charge of you? Once you have that mental picture, please write down a word(s) to describe what you are doing in it. Below are some examples:

Example - INSTEAD of judging my value as a teacher, I'LL BE COMPASSIONATE WITH MYSELF AND FIND WAYS TO IMPROVE MY TEACHING.

Example - INSTEAD of avoiding working on a technical aspect I feel insecure about, I'LL RESEARCH WAYS TO WORK AND SOLVE THIS TECHNICAL ASPECT AND ASK COLLEAGUES FOR ADVICE.

As this exercise ends, hopefully now you are learning to create an "Observing Self" inside you to tap into whenever you are over-identified with your thoughts, memories, emotions, sensations, or urges, and are allowing them to define you professionally. You are both separate from and bigger than your most troublesome internal experiences, including the stories your mind has been telling you for some time now. By simply observing those experiences you learn to not be defined by them, which can help you respond more flexibly to them when going through a difficult experience at work that challenges how you identify yourself as a teacher.

EXERCISE: Guiding Your Students to Create a More Flexible Sense of Themselves

Noticing and Help Students Notice

When you hear a student express an upsetting thought or judgment about themselves.

Music teacher:

“It’s not the first time I heard you say this, is it?”

“Did you notice what you said just now? That’s quite a tough judgment on yourself.”

“Is there any other thought related to this one you’re having now?” “Is this something you might be saying to yourself often?”

Naming it

When naming stories, first obtain their permission and be sure not to harm sensitivities.

Music teacher:

“Could we perhaps try to name this story, so we can more quickly identify it when it comes up next time?”

“Oh, I think I’m hearing the ‘I’m such a failure’ story again... Did you notice it?”

Helping Them to Defuse From it

When your student is getting too fused with their limiting self-stories.

Music teacher:

“Ok, we’ve noticed that this story is here again, and I know it feels real. Can you see now that you’re the one that is here in the present moment, and your thoughts and this story are separate from you, even though they’re about you?”

“Let’s try to take a step back from it.”

“If this isn’t helpful for you right now, how about you write it down and put the paper away in your pocket?”

“Let’s let the story tell itself in the background, and just turn the volume down a bit.”

Go Back to What Matters:

When your student is feeling distressed about their self-stories in the lesson.

Music teacher:

“What is it that really matters to you now? How can you move towards it?”

“What would you rather do if this story weren’t blocking you?”

EXERCISE: Questions to Help Your Students Identify Their Music-Related Values

1) As you did in Chapter 7 when trying to discover your performance-related values, you can start by asking your students some general, introductory questions:

What is most important in this music piece for you?

What do you want to express with this music?

What do you believe this music piece stands for?

What do you think the composer wanted to achieve with it? How can you effectively convey this?

2) You can also link the student's values to their goals, or what they want to achieve in doing a piece of music:

What do you want to achieve by playing this music?

What do you want to achieve when playing this music for others?

3) Lastly, you can link states of emotion or motivation to what a student values about a piece of music, and using mental imagery may further help with this:

What excites you most about this music piece? What do you like about this music piece?

Do any images come to your mind when you think about this music? What do they evoke for you?

Answering these questions will help your students get a more concrete sense of how they want to interpret a specific music piece and what direction they can take. In the same way that performance-related values provide more direction and purpose for one's performances, understanding what matters when playing a music piece will help your students clarify their values related to how they want to perform it. Doing so may also help you to further clarify your own values as a music teacher.

EXERCISE: Questions to Help Identify Your Teaching-Related Values

1) Again, here are some introductory questions to help identify your teaching-related values:

What is most important about being a music teacher for you?

What do you stand for as a teacher?

How do you want to be known or remembered as a music teacher?

2) Here are a few more specific questions that will identify your teaching-related values, using phrases commonly used by music teachers:

When you're teaching effectively, what do you need to do in order for things to go well?

When you see others teaching in an effective way, what are they doing that makes their teaching so effective?

When you're making good teaching decisions, what are you doing?

When someone else is making good teaching decisions, what are they doing?

3) Here are some questions that will help uncover your teaching-related values, as they relate to your goals:

What are some important future goals you want to achieve in your teaching, and why are they important?

What were some important goals you achieved in the last year or two in your teaching, and why were they important?

In general, what are some important goals any music teacher should have?

4) Again, you can link your emotions to your teaching-related values, as you've learned to do previously:

Whenever you are feeling alive or excited during a lesson you're teaching, what are you typically doing?

Whenever someone else's teaching leaves you feeling alive or excited, what are they typically doing?

When in a state of full engagement with your teaching, what are you typically doing?

When you observe others in a state of full engagement with their teaching, what are they typically doing?

Have you ever had a sad feeling related to your teaching, or related to being a teacher, if so - can you say why?

Would it make you sad if you gave up teaching? Why? Would you miss out on anything important?

5) Lastly, you can link states of motivation and increased action to what your teaching-related values are:

What do you have a craving to do more of in your teaching?

What are you naturally motivated to do during your teaching?

Tell me about a time(s) in your career as a teacher when you were feeling inspired or motivated. What do you think made you feel that way?

What is it about being a teacher that keeps you motivated to teach?

Now, that you've answered these questions about your teaching-related values, you can use them to formulate your own Teaching Mission Statement, in the same way you did when creating your Performance Mission Statement in Chapter 7. Below are some examples, but be sure to follow your own values for teaching music when creating it.

EXERCISE: Writing Your Teaching Mission Statement

First, convert your value(s) into a statement using the following format:

I value being a _____ (adjective), _____ (noun).

I value being a _____, _____ teacher.

Next, follow the two examples below for the steps needed to create your mission statement:

Example #1 - for only one teaching-related value:

I value being a competent teacher.

If you want, you can add in more than one adjective to your statement:

I value being a competent and capable teacher.

If you use multiple adjectives, be sure they follow a similar idea and are not too discrepant, or too randomly connected, e.g., “*I value being a flexible and uncompromising teacher,*” wouldn’t make sense because it includes discrepant values.

Next, you’ll want to offer an example(s) of an action(s) that is consistent with your stated value. Continuing with the same example:

I value being a competent and capable _____ teacher.

by (example of valued action) working on my musicianship and teaching skills.
and/or by (example of valued action) preparing my lessons,
and/or by (example of valued action) learning the best ways to teach my instrument.
etc.

Teaching Mission Statement:

“I value being a competent and capable teacher by working on my musicianship and teaching skills, by preparing my lessons, and by learning the best ways to teach my instrument.”

Example #2 - for more than one teaching value:

If you have more than one teaching-related value, you’ll want to flesh out the second value and provide examples of valued actions that correspond to it. We’ve combined these steps into the following sample mission statement:

I value being a supportive teacher by being compassionate and mindful of the processes my students are going through.

Now you can combine Example #1's Teaching Mission Statement with this new example's information to create a more comprehensive mission statement:

Teaching Mission Statement:

"I value being a capable and competent teacher by working on my musicianship and teaching skills, by preparing my lessons, and by learning the best ways to teach my instrument. I also value being a supportive teacher by being compassionate towards my students and by being mindful of the processes they are going through."

Here are some blank formulas and a blank Teaching Mission Statement for you to fill out:

Formula for one value with room for multiple valued actions:

I value being a _____,
by (example of valued action) _____,
and/or by (example of valued action) _____,
and/or by (example of valued action) _____,
etc.

Teaching Mission Statement:

Here are some more blank formulas and a blank Teaching Mission Statement for you to fill out:

Formula for multiple values, each with multiple valued actions:

I value being a _____,
by (example of valued action) _____,
and/or by (example of valued action) _____,
and/or by (example of valued action) _____,
etc.

and

I also value being a _____,
by (example of valued action) _____,
and/or by (example of valued action) _____,
and/or by (example of valued action) _____,
etc.

and

I also value being a _____,
by (example of valued action) _____,
and/or by (example of valued action) _____,
and/or by (example of valued action) _____,
etc.

Teaching Mission Statement:

Your Final Teaching Mission Statement:

EXERCISE: Specifying Your Teaching-Related Goals

Using part of the value in the second example from the previous exercise, let's walk you through translating your valued actions into specific goals.

Shortened Teaching Mission Statement for Example #2:

I value being a supportive teacher by being compassionate and mindful of the processes they are going through.

Let's isolate one valued action: ***being compassionate and mindful of the processes they are going through.***

Suppose the following scenario is also occurring with one of your students - the student is having difficulty learning a new piece of music and it's making them feel very frustrated.

1) First, ask yourself - *How can this valued action be made more concrete?*

Again, something is concrete when it's tangible and real. Here are some ideas following this example:

- I will ask my student what they are going through and pay attention to their answers.
(They might tell you they are feeling frustrated with learning this piece of music).

Let's further specify how this could be done.

- I will ask my student what they're going through, what they have done since last lesson and how it's affected their confidence, and I will pay attention to their answers when planning the current lesson.

Let's now address how we can make this more measurable by making it observable and quantifiable. Remember that a measurable valued action has to be observable and quantifiable by other people, to make it as concrete as possible.

2) So now, ask yourself - *How can I measure this valued action?*

- I will ask my student what they're going through when they arrive to the lesson, what they have done since last lesson and how it's affected their confidence, and I will pay attention to their answers. I'll propose a concrete plan of what to work on during today's lesson based on what they tell me, 10 minutes of which will include doing defusion/ acceptance skills with them.

Here, we've clearly defined when we will ask students how they are doing, how we will be mindful of their answers in planning today's lesson, and how we will use appropriate ACT skills to help them remain resilient in the face of this difficult learning process. These actions are observable to others, i.e., the student.

3) Finally, ask yourself - *How will I know if/when I've achieved this goal?*

By adding in an end-point and a measure of success, you can clarify how you'll know you've achieved your goal. This is the last step in translating your valued action into a goal. Putting everything together might look like this:

My Teaching-Related Goal:

- I will ask my students what they're going through when they arrive to the lesson, what they have done since last lesson and how it's affected their confidence, and I will pay attention to their answers. I'll propose a concrete plan of what to work on during today's lesson based on what they tell me, 10 minutes of which will include doing defusion/ acceptance skills with them. I'll know if my intervention is working when the student states they are more willing to move forward with learning the piece, and/or if they're less caught up with their thoughts about their frustration.

This process may take more than just 10 minutes, but if you continue over several lessons to teach them defusion and acceptance skills, their willingness to move forward will eventually increase, and their fusion with their thoughts will eventually decrease. An indicator these outcomes are occurring is the student will show willingness to move forward with learning the new music *more often via their committed actions* than they want to avoid working on it, and their artistic presence will be more noticeable to you when they're performing in front of you.

EXERCISE: Identifying Your Barriers and How to Cope with Them

Let's continue with the example from above.

My Teaching-Related Goal:

- I will ask my student what they're going through when they arrive to the lesson, what they have done since last lesson and how it's affected their confidence, and I will pay attention to their answers. I'll propose a concrete plan of what to work on during today's lesson based on what they tell me, 10 minutes of which will include doing defusion/ acceptance skills with them. I'll know if my intervention is working when the student states they feel more willing to move forward with learning the piece, and/or if they're less caught up with their thoughts about their frustration.

Sample barrier #1 - Stress of too many students coming one after the other, not having enough time to really ask how the student is doing

Sample barrier #2 - Worry about not being able to use ACT skills properly with my student (defusion and acceptance)

Sample barrier #3 - Getting lost in my own agenda of what I want this student to achieve, instead of understanding how my student is presently doing, and what he is actually ready to work on

Just like you did in Chapter 8, you'll want to ask yourself here what ACT skills (or other skills) you might use to cope with these barriers, so they don't interfere with your commitment to seeing your teaching-related goals through to completion.

Here are some examples of how to cope with these sample barriers:

Sample barrier #1 - Stress of too many students coming one after the other, not having enough time to really ask how the student is doing

How I can cope - Brief mindfulness exercise, allowing the stress to be here, noticing and defusing from stressful thoughts and refocusing on the task at hand and what matters to me

Sample barrier #2 - Worry about not being able to use ACT skills properly with my student (defusion and acceptance)

How I can cope - Defuse from my thoughts about applying defusion! Increase my willingness to make mistakes, because I'm early in the learning process myself in using ACT in my lessons. Be compassionate to myself for having this worry.

Sample barrier #3 - Getting lost in my own agenda of what I want this student to achieve, instead of understanding how my student is presently doing, and what he is actually ready to work on

How I can cope - *Defuse from my thoughts/beliefs about how the lesson “should go” before it starts. Use mindful acceptance and defusion to cultivate my teaching presence to actually be open and curious about how the student is doing, and about how this past week was for him.*

As we did in Chapter 8, we’ll now provide you with a sheet on which you can write your Teaching Mission Statement and your goals, barriers, and how you plan to cope with them.

My Teaching Mission Statement:

My Teaching-Related Goal:

My Teaching Barriers:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

How I Can Cope with Them (Using ACT Skills or Other Skills):

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

EXERCISE: Learning to Use the ACT Matrix with a Concrete Example

Music Teacher:

“So, the audition is in a few months and we’ve selected the repertoire you’ll want to present. Now, I think it’d be good to work a bit on preparing ourselves for it, if that’s ok with you?”

(Wait for your student’s approval).

“Have you thought a little bit about what is important for you when thinking about performing for this audition? What really matters to you, and what do you want to achieve?”

Student:

“Well of course I want to perform as well as I possibly can. I guess most importantly, I want to enjoy myself and the music while performing, and I want to be focused on what I’m doing and sing in the best way I can.”

*With this first answer you can quickly understand what your student’s values and possible valued actions are, see below:

She values “enjoying herself and the music while performing.” “being focused on what she’s doing,” and “singing the best she can.”

Whether she identifies these things as her values right away or not, work to help her understand why they are likely her values - because they are freely chosen by her, not you, and they are the most important qualities about her performing in this audition - and write them into the lower right quadrant of the Matrix, like below. If you’re unsure whether they are truly her values or not, use questions to flesh them out in more detail as you did earlier in this chapter and in Chapter 7. If you can link states of engagement and feelings of excitement with actions that reflect these general values, they are likely her true values.

Music Teacher:

“Ok, so from your answers to those questions, I think we can start to identify those as your ‘performance-related values,’ and we’ll write them down here on the Matrix. Let’s write them in the bottom right quadrant (Figure 18b).”

*Be sure to check with your student if there’s anything else that comes to mind about her performance-related values, especially if it’s the first time you’re doing this with them - they might need more time to find the answer to your questions. If they answer with a goal, e.g., “I want to get the role I’m auditioning for,” gently explain that “We’re looking for bigger picture values, rather than specific goals, that can reward you during your performances and make you feel alive/excited whenever you do them, not only during this audition, but always.” After identifying her values, you can move onto the lower left quadrant to help identify the upsetting internal experiences (thoughts, feelings, etc.) that make valued actions difficult. Here’s an example of how that conversation might go:

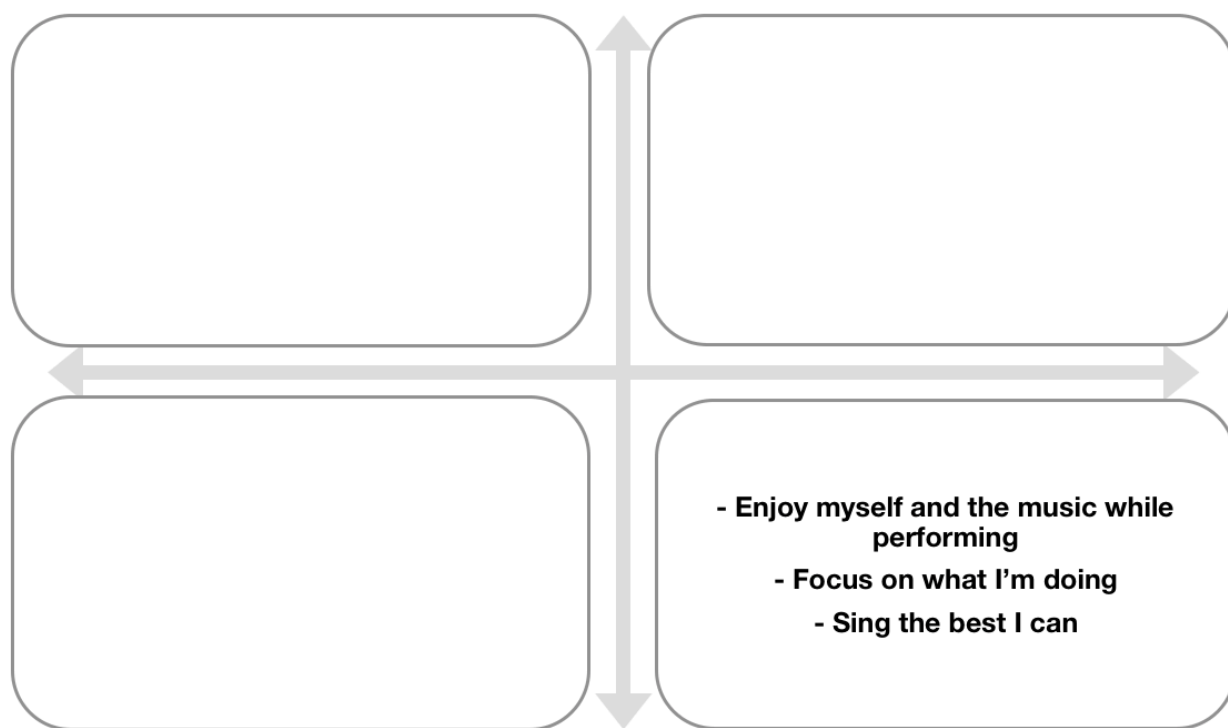


Figure 18b. The ACT Matrix (values).

Music Teacher:

“Great, now that we've written your answers down, I hope it's clearer for you what your performance-related values are that you'll want to focus on in this performance. As you know, you can't influence the outcome of the audition, or what the jury may think, but you can focus on your values. What I mean is you can prioritize enjoying yourself, staying focused on what needs to be done, and singing as best you can, given everything that shows up for you. Now, when you think about what may show up for you, like your thoughts, feelings, or other internal experiences, what comes to mind? Let's dig a bit to see what's underneath the surface here.”

Student:

“Well, I feel very positive about enjoying the music, but I guess I also worry about being too nervous to be able to do that, or of failing somehow, or not performing well. I start thinking about all those difficult passages, like the high notes and the end of the aria we are doing... I guess I'm getting nervous and I wonder if I'll really be able to sing well at all.”

*Not all students may have as much insight into their thoughts and feelings like this one does. Make sure to give them time to think about it. You could encourage them to think about it during the week, and/or have them imagine being in the situation to see what thoughts or emotions show up, or just ask them what typically shows up for them. Once you've pinpointed what those upsetting internal experiences might be, write them into the bottom left quadrant (Figure 18c).

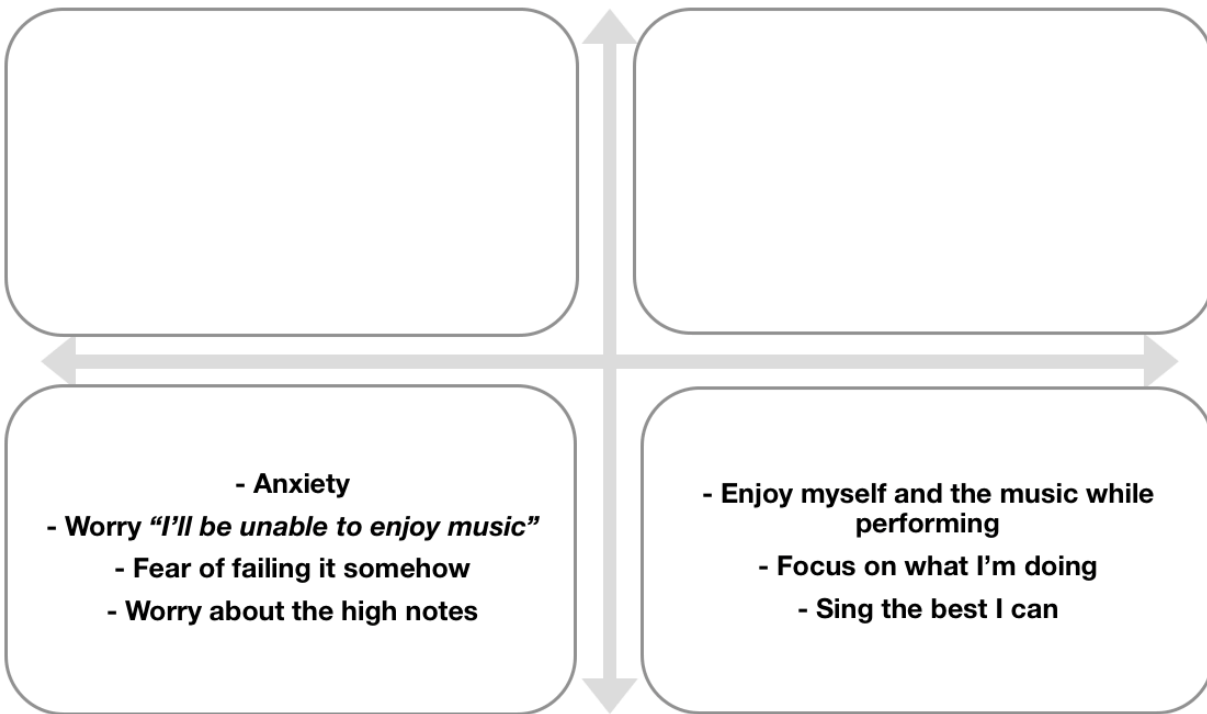


Figure 18c. The ACT Matrix (internal barriers).

Music Teacher:

“I love that the first thing that comes up is that you feel positive about enjoying yourself! About those worries you’re having, though, let me tell you, it’s totally natural to think that way about an audition. Auditions are one of the biggest sources of anxiety for musicians. I can totally relate to how you’re feeling. Let’s keep writing your answers here in the bottom left quadrant, so we can be really aware of what you’re facing here. Let’s also notice if something else shows up too, either now or later.”

*Once you’ve identified her unwanted internal experiences, you can move on to help the student recognize what she usually does to try and control or avoid them. For example - avoid practicing challenging passages, avoid practice altogether, avoid doing the audition, fusing with thoughts, using alcohol to suppress upsetting emotions.

Music Teacher:

“Well, we’re really making progress here. Tell me - when you have those upsetting thoughts and feelings about this performance, what do you normally do to try to control, avoid, or even escape them?”

Student:

“Hmm, I guess the main thing I do is to try to reason with myself? Say that I’m being silly, or I’ll tell myself I’ve been able to achieve the high notes much better these last weeks, so just stop worrying and do it already!”

Music Teacher:

“So, you’d enter into a dialogue with yourself, to try and talk yourself out of feeling anxious then? Like one part of you tries to control the other?”

Student:

“Yes, exactly. I can be pretty harsh actually sometimes...”

Music Teacher:

“Meanwhile, when you’re debating with yourself, you’re not really working towards those things we identified earlier as your values, are you? Like enjoying singing in that very moment when you’re debating yourself, or focusing on what you’re doing?”

Student:

“Right, I guess I’m not... Sometimes if I’m not getting it correctly right away when I start to practice, I prefer to just forget about it and decide to postpone practice for another time, or I just move on and sing something else instead.”

Music Teacher:

“Ok, so in this case you either attempt to get everything correct right away, or you just let it go then. This is also normal - dare I say we’ve all been there. It’s true that sometimes insisting too much might actually do more harm than good, but giving up on practice usually never leads you anywhere good. In general, what I want you to understand is this - although it’s natural to enter in this kind of inner dialogue and resort to those strategies when confronting these difficult thoughts and emotions, these tactics actually might pull you further *away* from becoming the musician you want to be - the one who enjoys herself while performing.”

“Let’s write those strategies you’ve been using down, so we continue to see what you’re working with exactly.”

*Write those strategies in the upper left quadrant (Figure 18d):

*After identifying the strategies that move this student *away* from her values, you then move on to helping her recognize what she can do to move *towards* her values more often during her performances, i.e., her valued actions. Be sure to clarify that such *towards moves* can be done while *simultaneously* having her unwanted internal experiences. Using skills like mindfulness, acceptance and defusion will foster such psychologically flexible behavior.

Music Teacher:

“Ok, so instead of debating or trying to control those worries and emotions and instead of postponing practice, what could you do to move towards what’s important for you - to move towards the values we’ve written in the bottom right quadrant?”

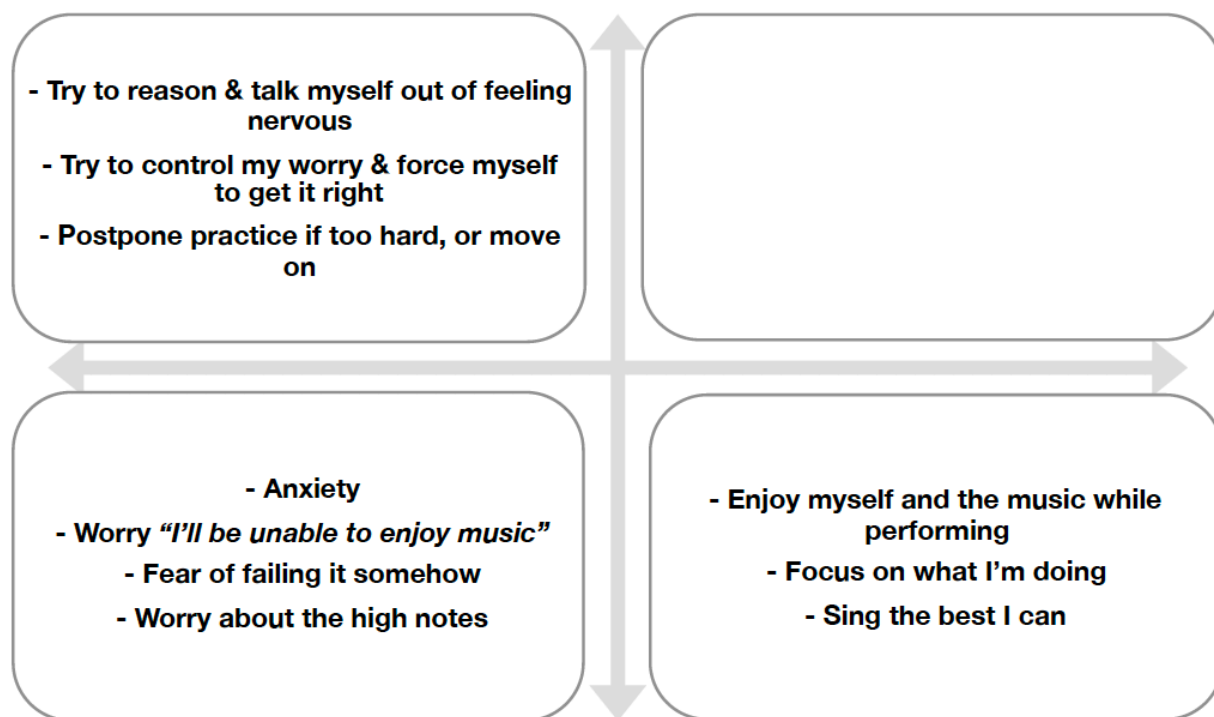


Figure 18d. The ACT Matrix (away moves).

Student:

"Well actually, when I practice what I'm going to sing I can get really engaged if I focus on what I'm doing right now, instead of focusing on the result, I guess. Of course, I worry about the high notes and sometimes it doesn't go exactly how I wanted, but usually when I do the exercises you told me, it gets better. Sometimes when I feel like giving up practicing, I just try to take a deep breath and refocus on what gives me pleasure when singing. I guess that's a start?"

Music Teacher:

"I love those, yes! Focusing on what matters, on your valued actions instead of what troubles you, bringing yourself to do the exercises we've been doing, and taking a deep breath to refocus on what matters is great. If you're feeling particularly nervous or discouraged you could even do a brief mindfulness exercise (refer her to the exercises from earlier). Lastly, I'd also add to the list being compassionate towards yourself for having difficulty. Accepting those worries and your anxiety for what they are - just passing internal experiences - and letting them be, and even giving them space to be, will be more fruitful than trying to fight/debate them."

*Again, it might take more time with your students to identify what valued actions they could engage in during their performances. This also depends on whether you've introduced ACT skills to them already, like mindfulness, acceptance, defusion, and the Observing Self, or not. We encourage you to speak about these skills often with your students, so when you encounter a more specific problem during the lesson, your student(s) will already have some ideas of what skill(s) they could use to get back on track. Once you've identified which valued actions might help this student to remain in touch with her performance-related values, write them down in the upper right quadrant. But first, here's one last dialogue that shows how that conversation might end:

Music Teacher:

“So here we have it, now you can see not only what matters to you, but how you might move away from it, and also what actions you can take to move again towards it. Let’s write down what you can do into the upper right quadrant (Figure 18e). Feel free to add anything else you might like to, or make a new Matrix for another issue (there is a blank one later on). I must say I really love that you can find pleasure and joy in practicing, because most of your time will be spent on that as a professional musician! About the worry, as I told you before, it will be there and it’s normal to have it, especially because you’re just starting on your journey as a musician. If you can learn to make space for it, while continuing to focus on what matters in your performance, then you’ll have already won, because you’ll be moving towards your values! Lastly, I’d like to tell you that no matter how big the storm of thoughts and emotions is inside of you, you can always access this part of you that is solid and just notices all those internal experiences neutrally. That part of you will be there during your audition too, and you can access that ‘Observing Self’ whenever you want to.”

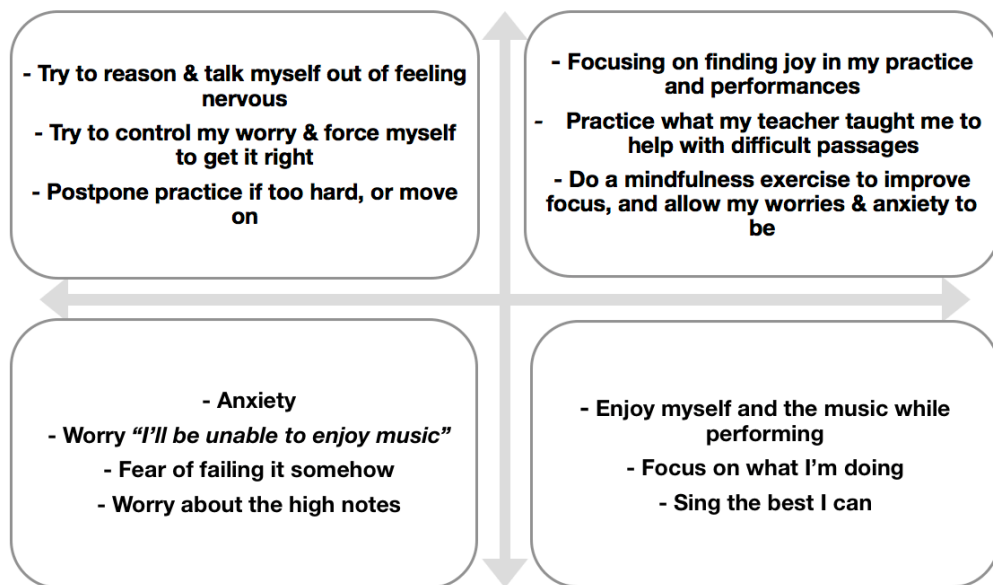


Figure 18e. The ACT Matrix (towards moves).

Student:

“Right, even for difficult emotions or thoughts, I can always just observe them, as if from an observer’s point of view and act like a curious scientist trying to understand and analyze them. I like having this written right here, it’s much clearer to me. I’ll hang this on the wall close to where I practice, and I’ll do my best to focus on those right-side quadrants.”

Music Teacher:

“Perfect, let’s add that Observing Self part of you into the background of the Matrix. We’ll call it simply, ‘Me, noticing.’”

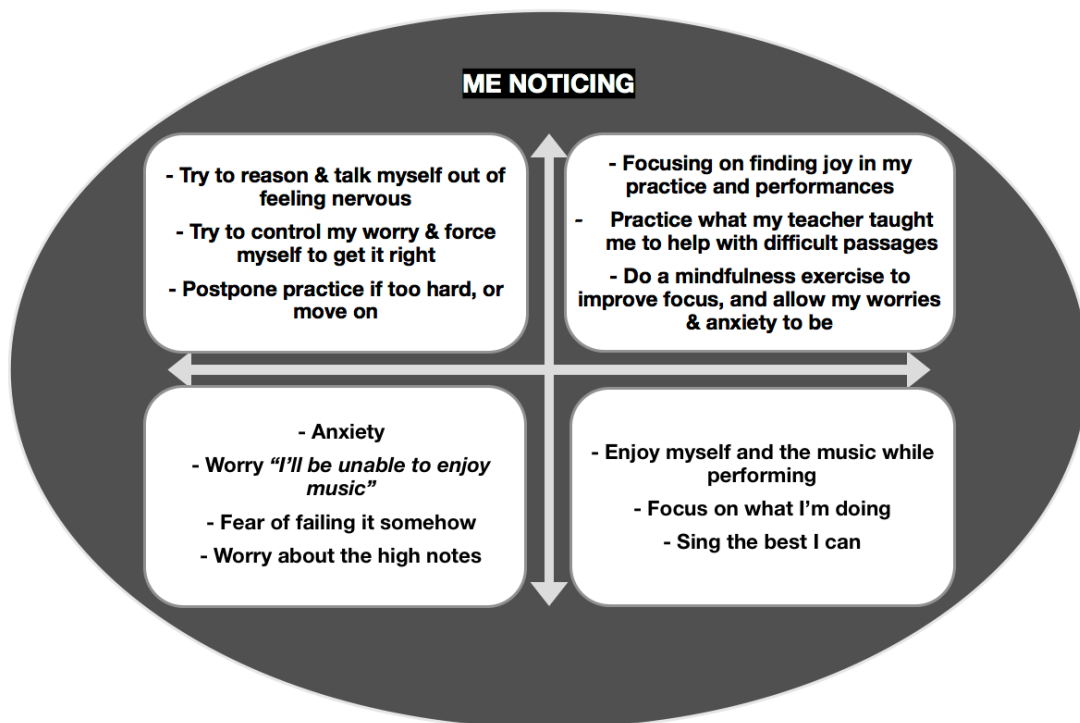


Figure 18f. The ACT Matrix (completed Matrix + Observing Self).

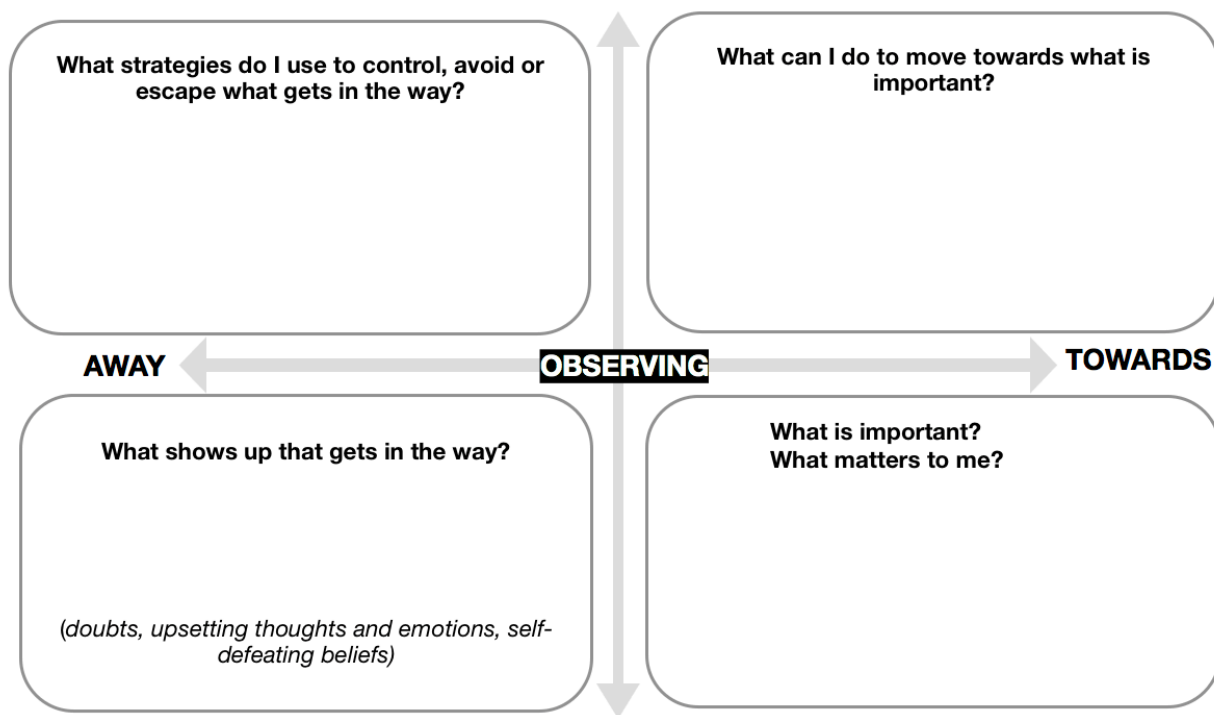


Figure 18g. The ACT Matrix (blank).