



## Creating Flow Experiences

 Happiness

 Exercise

 45 min

 Client

 No

Flow is described as the psychological experience of being involved and engaged in what one is doing (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975). A state of flow is an optimal and desirable state. When in flow, the entire focus is on the task at hand, and performance unfolds as one intended action after another. Experiencing flow is intrinsically rewarding, drawing those who experience it back to this optimal psychological state (Jackson, 2016).

According to Csikszentmihalyi (1975), flow occurs when the difficulty of a situation and an individual's skills are both balanced above an individual's average levels of challenges and skills. In other words, we enter a state of flow when our skill level matches the challenge being faced. Striking this balance between skill and challenge is liberating, giving us the sense that "I can do it." Jackson (2016) stated that during flow, we "know exactly what it is we want to do; we receive clear feedback about how well we are doing; we become totally immersed in what we are doing, to the point of action and awareness merging; we are totally focused on the task at hand; we experience a sense of control and a loss of self-consciousness; we may have a sense of change in the normal passage of time; and what we experience provides such a high level of intrinsic reward that we are motivated to return to this state, (pp. 142)" This tool helps people create flow experiences to increase the amount of flow in their daily lives.



### Author

This tool was created by Lucinda Poole (PsyD) and Hugo Alberts (Ph.D.).



### Goal

The goal of this tool is to design a flow experience with your client that is to be completed as homework to increase the amount of flow in their daily lives.



## Advice

- Flow occurs when a person's skills are fully engaged in overcoming a challenge that is just about manageable; therefore, the challenge should not be too high (otherwise your client may become frustrated, anxious, and eventually disinterested) or too low (otherwise your client may become overly relaxed and eventually bored).
- Flow-producing activities require an initial investment of attention and effort before they begin to be enjoyable and feel effortless. If your client is too tired, anxious, or lacks the discipline to overcome this initial hurdle, he/she may settle for a less enjoyable, though more accessible activity, such as watching television. If this occurs, it is important to provide further psychoeducation on the notion of striking a balance between challenge and skill to achieve flow.
- It is essential to encourage your client to approach the challenge aspect of their flow activity with an attitude of openness, leaning into the challenge, and letting go of the fear of judgments and evaluations of performance.
- Flow experiences are more powerful when shared with others, so encourage your client to involve other people when possible.
- If the client reaches Step 5 without identifying a flow activity, re-visit Step 4 and spend as much time as needed to determine how he/she can meet the three conditions of flow. Flow activities can be created from even the most mundane tasks, and so persistence is the key here.
- For clients or practitioners who need further education on the concept of flow, refer to Exploring Flow Experiences in the Toolkit.



## References

- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1975). *Beyond boredom and anxiety*. Jossey-Bass
- Jackson, S. (2016). Flowing with mindfulness. In I. Ivtzan, & T. Lomas, (Eds.). *Mindfulness in positive psychology: The science of meditation and wellbeing* (pp. 141-155). Routledge.



# Creating Flow Experiences

## Instructions

This exercise is designed to help you increase the amount of flow in your daily life. In positive psychology, flow is the psychological experience of being fully immersed in a feeling of energized focus, full involvement, and enjoyment during an activity. In other words, flow is 'being in the zone.'

During flow, the experience of deep, unwavering focus and effortless involvement and engagement in an activity is so great that one loses track of time, loses feelings of self-consciousness, worries about the judgment of others, and feels highly motivated to persist in the activity.

Have you ever felt this way before? If so, when?

## Step 1: Brainstorm flow activities

In the space below, write down as many possible flow-producing activities as you can think of. Remember that flow activities are activities where you feel completely engaged and immersed in what you're doing, so much so that you lose track of time and self-consciousness. At this stage, don't worry about the feasibility of the activities, just come up with as many ideas as you can. *Examples include skiing, gardening, cooking, and catching up with friends.*



### Step 2: Top three flow activities

From your list of potential flow-producing activities (Step 1), which three activities are you most drawn to? Which activities are the most attractive and exciting to you? Place a checkmark next to these three activities.

### Step 3: Assess feasibility

Now, consider the feasibility and practicality of your 'top three' activities in your life. Of these, which activity could you engage in at least once this week? (If multiple activities are feasible for you this week, select the one that you would like to do the most).

My flow activity:

### Step 4: Meet flow conditions

To achieve flow, three conditions must be met: clarity of a goal, immediate feedback on progress, and balanced skill level versus challenge being faced. With regards to your chosen flow activity (Step 3), determine how each of the following three conditions will be met:

What is it that I want to achieve or gain from this activity?

How will I know how well I am doing while doing this activity?



Given my current skill level, how challenging does this activity need to be to keep me interested and engaged?

**Step 5: Start flowing!**

Now that you have ensured your chosen activity meets the conditions for flow (Step 4), decide when you can schedule it in the coming week. Take into account the following:

a. Time needed (Be lenient here, given we tend to lose track of time during flow activities):

b. Day of the week and time of day:

c. Materials needed:



d. Involvement of others:

### Step 6: Evaluation

Once you have completed your flow activity, write about your experience in the space below. Reflect on how you felt before, during, and after, and what it's like to allow yourself to fully engage in an activity of your choice.