

Meditation for Focus — Workbook

This workbook turns the Meditation for Focus course into a real, trackable practice. Each section follows a course module, giving you the exercises, worksheets, and checklists to set up an alert sit, run the four-phase attention cycle, work with distraction and hindrances, and climb a measured session ladder. Fill it in as you go, and the editable templates become your reusable session log, ladder planner, and distraction tracker so you can watch your attention strengthen week over week.

Why Focus Is Trainable: Attention, the Wandering Mind, and the Right Technique

Reframe focus as a trainable skill, accept the wandering mind, and commit to one focused-attention technique.

Exercise: Reframe Your Beliefs About Focus

Surface how you currently think about your attention, then rewrite it using the trainable-networks model from the course. Honest answers here change how you treat every future sit.

- Write the story you currently tell yourself about your focus (for example I have a short attention span or my mind is too busy). Is it framed as a fixed trait or a trainable skill?

- Which of the three attention networks, alerting, orienting, or executive, do you most want to strengthen, and in what real situation (deep work, reading, conversation)?

- If catching a wandering mind is the exercise itself rather than a failure, what would change about how you judge a session?

- What is the smallest daily commitment, around twelve minutes or less, you are confident you could keep for two weeks?

Checklist: Set Up for Attention Training

- Decide explicitly that your goal is sustained attention, not generic relaxation
- Commit to focused attention on the breath as your single technique for the first several weeks
- Pick one anchor location to commit to, the nostrils or the belly, and resist switching mid-week
- Accept the 47 percent wandering baseline so you do not grade sits by how few thoughts arise
- Choose to value how many times you notice and return, not how still the sit was
- Avoid technique-hopping between apps, anchors, and styles while you build the habit

Worksheet: My Focus Baseline

Record an honest starting point before you build the habit, so you can compare against it after four to eight weeks. Leave any rating you have not measured yet blank.

Date of baseline

Typical daily situations where I lose focus most

Estimated minutes I can read or work before reaching for my phone

Current self-rated focus, 1 to 5 (1 = scattered, 5 = sharp)

Current meditation experience (none, occasional, regular)

My one-sentence reason for training focus

Target daily session length to start with (minutes)

The Foundations of a Sit: Posture, Breath Anchor, and the Four-Phase Cycle

Set an alert posture and environment, choose and stabilise a breath anchor, and run the four-phase cycle.

Checklist: Posture and Environment Setup

- Sit on a chair with feet flat, or cross-legged on a cushion that lifts hips above knees
- Stack the spine upright so it self-supports; lengthen gently from base to crown
- Drop the shoulders and rest the hands settled on thighs or in the lap
- Lower the gaze and close the eyes, or keep a soft half-open gaze if drowsy
- Choose one consistent place and time and attach the sit to an existing daily cue
- Put the phone in airplane mode and use it only as a timer
- Keep the room cool and lightly lit rather than warm and dim to fight drowsiness

Exercise: Choose and Test Your Breath Anchor

Try each anchor for a few breaths, then commit to one for your first weeks. The goal is one precise point you can feel and return to without controlling the breath.

- Where do you feel the breath most clearly, the cool-in and warm-out at the nostrils, or the rise and fall of the belly?

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- Which anchor will you commit to for the first few weeks, and why (nostrils for sharper concentration, belly for easier grounding)?

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- Did you catch yourself controlling or deepening the breath? How will you remind yourself to observe rather than steer it?

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- Will you use a support such as counting breaths one to ten on the exhale, and when might you drop it?
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Worksheet: Four-Phase Cycle Observation Log

Right after a sit, reflect on how you moved through the four phases. This trains you to see wandering and returning as the exercise, not a failure. Leave counts blank until you have actually estimated them.

Date and session length

Anchor used (nostrils / belly)

Roughly how often the mind wandered (estimate)

How quickly meta-awareness fired (slow / improving / quick)

Tone of my returns (harsh / neutral / friendly)

Longest stretch of sustained attention (estimate, seconds or minutes)

One phrase describing this sit (for example many short cycles, or steadier than usual)

Checklist: Run One Clean Repetition

- Notice the moment you realise you have drifted off the breath
- Treat that catch as the win, the instant attention came back online
- Disengage from the thought without replaying a story about wandering
- Place attention back on the anchor gently, the way you would redirect a puppy
- Rest on the breath again until the next drift, without bracing against it
- Repeat for the whole timer, counting each return as a quality rep

Working With Distraction: Noting, Labelling, and Common Hindrances

Use noting to sharpen meta-awareness, apply antidotes to the five hindrances, and drop self-criticism.

Exercise: Practise Noting for a Week

For one week, label each distraction with a single neutral word, then return. Afterwards, review what your labels reveal about where your attention escapes.

- Which one-word labels did you use most (thinking, planning, remembering, hearing, restlessness, sleepiness)?

- Did labelling create a sliver of distance from the distraction, making the return easier? Describe an example.

- What was your dominant distraction theme, and does it point to an unresolved concern you could write down before sitting?

- Did noting ever become too wordy or busy? How will you simplify it (for example one label, thinking, for everything)?

Worksheet: Five Hindrances Diagnostic

When a sit goes sideways, identify which hindrance is present and apply its specific antidote. Fill this in for a recent difficult session.

Date of the difficult sit

Which hindrance was dominant (restlessness, drowsiness, desire/planning, aversion, doubt)

Was the arousal dial too high (restless) or too low (dull)?

Antidote applied (slow the exhale / straighten and brighten / note planning / soften and allow / recommit)

Did acknowledging it work better than fighting it? What happened

My personal recurring hindrance across recent sits

One adjustment to make before the next sit (for example jot to-dos first, practise earlier, more light)

Checklist: Drop Self-Criticism Mid-Sit

- Notice the self-critical thought as it arises (this is going terribly, I cannot do this)
- Recognise it as just another thought, not a fact or a measure of your worth
- Note it lightly as judging or thinking, the same as any distraction
- Return to the breath with a friendly tone, never a scolding one
- Let the missed minutes go; the only sit that matters is the next breath
- Redefine a good session as one where you returned each time without drama

Building the Habit: Progressing Length, Tracking Attention, and Going Deeper

Climb the session ladder, design a habit that survives missed days, track attention, and transfer focus to daily life.

Worksheet: Design Your Habit Stack

Write the exact implementation intention that will trigger your sit, then the guardrails that protect it. A specific sentence is far stickier than a vague resolve.

My habit-stack sentence: after I [existing habit], I will sit for [minutes]

Fixed time of day for the sit

Fixed place for the sit

How I will mark the streak (wall calendar, app, journal)

My never-miss-twice rule and what I will do after one missed day

My minimum bad-day sit length that still counts (for example 2 minutes)

The timer or app I will use for start, end, and interval bells

Checklist: Climb the Five-to-Twenty-Five Ladder

- Weeks 1 to 2: sit 5 minutes daily, focusing only on showing up every day
- Weeks 3 to 4: extend to 10 minutes once 5 feels routine
- Weeks 5 to 6: move to 15 minutes, using noting to catch drifts faster
- Weeks 7 to 8: reach 20 minutes, holding sustained attention longer between drifts
- Week 9 onward: settle at 20 to 25 minutes as a sustainable daily target
- Climb a rung only when the current length feels comfortable, not on a fixed calendar
- On a hard day, do a shortened sit rather than skipping to protect the streak

Exercise: Transfer Focus Off the Cushion

Pick concrete daily-life moments to apply the four-phase cycle with the task as the anchor. Plan them in advance so the informal reps actually happen.

- Which single-task block (deep work, reading) will you treat as an anchor, returning each time you catch a drift?

- Where will you insert mindful pauses of three conscious breaths (before meetings, emails, hard

conversations)?

- Which routine action (washing dishes, walking) will you do with full attention to its sensations?
- In conversation, how will you notice when you are rehearsing your reply and return attention to the other person?

Worksheet: Weekly Attention Review

Review your session log weekly and read the trend, not any single day. Leave any cell blank until you have the data; do not guess a number you did not track.

Week ending date

Number of sessions completed this week

Total minutes meditated this week

Current ladder rung (minutes per sit)

Trend in how quickly I catch drifts (slower / same / faster)

Trend in my focus ratings (down / flat / up)

Did stress knock me off the anchor less than before? (yes / no / unsure)

One thing to adjust next week (rung, time, environment, anchor)

Your Action Plan

1. Reframe focus as a trainable skill and commit to focused attention on a single breath anchor for the first weeks
2. Set a fixed place and time and stack the sit onto an existing daily cue with a written implementation intention
3. Arrange an alert posture, upright spine and dropped shoulders, in a cool, lightly lit room with the phone on airplane mode
4. Choose one precise anchor, nostrils or belly, and rest on the breath without controlling it, using a count as a support if helpful
5. Run the four-phase cycle every sit, treating each catch as the win and every gentle return as a quality repetition
6. Use one-word noting to catch distraction earlier, and identify which of the five hindrances appears so you can apply its antidote
7. Meet self-criticism with a friendly, neutral return, redefining a good session as one where you returned each time without drama
8. Climb the ladder from 5 to 25 minutes, advancing only when the current length feels comfortable and never trading consistency for duration
9. Track each sit, length, distraction count, and a 1 to 5 focus rating, and review weekly for the trend rather than judging single days

10. Transfer the cycle to deep work, mindful pauses, and conversation, spending the attention you build and strengthening it further

