

Wheel of Well-being

Finding Flow



“Being completely involved in an activity for its own sake. The ego falls away. Time flies. Every action, movement and thought follows inevitably from the previous one, like playing jazz. Your whole being is involved, and you’re using your skills to the utmost.”

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi “Flow, The Psychology of Optimal Experience” (1990)



Conditions for flow

(Not all conditions are needed for flow to be experienced)

1. Clear goals: the actions and rules are easy to understand and follow
2. Concentrating and focusing; high level of concentration on a specific activity or action. The person involved will have time to focus and get deeply into it
3. A loss of the feeling of self-consciousness: action and awareness come together. You forget about what’s happening around you
4. A distorted sense of time: you lose track of time – ‘time flies’
5. Direct and immediate feedback: it’s easy to see what needs to be changed or corrected and you can adapt your behaviour/actions as needed
6. A sense of personal control over the situation or activity
7. The activity is intrinsically rewarding; you’re doing it because it’s rewarding in itself – you’re not doing it for money, or because you have to
8. Balance between ability level and challenge: the activity is not too easy, not too difficult
9. Environment: the surroundings are not disturbing

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Six steps to getting more flow into your life

The best way to help you have more flow in your life is to make any activity more flow-full. To help you do this, shape your daily life so that you routinely do things that facilitate flow. These facilitators of flow tell you not whether you are in flow but how to get more flow. To get more flow you can:

1. set yourself clear goals

tip: Set yourself a SMART goal for the activity. To be SMART, your goal should be:

Specific	Measurable	Achievable	Relevant	Time-bound
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2. get direct & immediate feedback

tip: Ask yourself how you can tell if you are on track in this activity (example – playing tennis - feedback would be to look for whether the tennis ball went over the net).

3. make the task challenging but not too challenging

tip: If it is not challenging enough – climb to the next step of the ladder.
If it is too challenging – break it down into chunks, and step to the first rung of the ladder.
Recall your past successes to increase confidence.

4. use your skills

tip: First make a list of your strengths and skills. Then think about how to apply as many of these as you can to the task at hand. For example, if ‘creativity’ is one of your strengths, look at how you could incorporate more art, music or drama into your daily activities.

5. enjoy the activity

tip: Play around with the idea of making the task more fun. Make the task more ‘you’ e.g. A history teacher who liked Woody Allen’s comedy introduced funny stories into his history lessons, with fantastic results.

6. concentrate on the task

tip: Keep your focus solely on your goal. To help do this, create an environment conducive to flow e.g.:

- no distractions
- not too noisy
- no interruptions

bonus tip

Even if you don’t experience flow every time, these 6 tips are well worth mastering as they are all part of personal effectiveness.

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Your own “**flow inventory**” can help you notice where you experience flow, so you can choose to increase these activities if you so wish.

1. The first step is to identify activities where you may already be experiencing flow. To do this, think about what you do in each of the 5 areas of life where flow emerges – sport, work, hobbies, other people and daily activities.

Jot down one or more possible flow activities in the ‘My flow activities’ column (column 3). You don’t have to be sure that you experience flow there, or always get flow from it. Jot it down if you think it has ever been a source of flow.

2. The second step is to mark each activity with a ‘0’ or a ‘1’ for each of the flow characteristics. For example, if your sporting activity is badminton, and you feel serene when playing badminton, put a 1 in the ‘serenity’ column.

3. The final step is to add up your score for each activity you have identified. Enter the total into the final column.

Pick one or two of the highest-scoring items. In the next week, set aside time for these high-flow activities. If you feel yourself sabotaging this process with thoughts like “I’m too busy”, then recall the good feeling you got last time you lost yourself in this activity to re-motivate yourself.



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