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Component Two

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Presence Over Perfection – 30 Days to Perform Freely
A mindful journey to self-acceptance and free, authentic performance

COMPONENT 1

Introduction and Rationale

I am a private singing teacher and choir leader, as well as a trained yoga and mindfulness instructor. While much of my time is dedicated to vocal teaching, I have a growing interest in exploring the benefits of mindful practices for singers. To date, the integrative dimension essential to interdisciplinary practice has remained underdeveloped in my work (Repko and Szostak, 2017), resulting in the yoga studio and singing studio functioning as separate, parallel spaces.

As a voice teacher I face a constant need to engage with the psychological barrier of anxiety in my students. This tendency is evident in the voice studio, where many of my female students express persistent fear of making mistakes and engage in self-critical judgement throughout practice and performance. Choir members also frequently seek one-to-one lessons to address performance anxiety, stage fright, and low self-esteem. Notably, students often attribute their anxiety to a perceived lack of innate talent or ability, rather than recognising it as a matter of cognitive interpretation (Paese and Egermann, 2024; Pecun et al., 2018). These traits suggest 'perfectionistic concern', increasingly recognised as central to performance-related distress (Diaz, 2018; Dobos et al., 2020; Park and Jeong, 2015; Stoeber and Eismann, 2007). Such beliefs often trap students in maladaptive behaviours and ruminative thinking, as described in cognitive-behavioural and metacognitive models of perfectionism (Kaleńska-Rodzaj, 2021; Xie et al., 2019).

A dismantling study into emotional reactivity and regulation asserts that 'training attention is the primary means by which emotional health is enhanced through mindfulness training' (Brown et al., 2022, p. 2). Mindfulness-based techniques are now widely integrated into therapeutic interventions for music performance anxiety (MPA) (Hölzel et al., 2011b, 2013). The use of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) marks a broader, evidence-based shift in MPA treatment (Juncos and de Paiva e Pona, 2018; Juncos and Markman, 2016; Mahony et al., 2022; Paul et al., 2024; Shaw et al., 2020). However, many students avoid professional help and instead turn to their teachers for support (Mazzarolo et al., 2023; Paese and Egermann, 2024; Suzuki and Pitts, 2024). While I am not a trained counsellor and must uphold ethical boundaries, mindfulness is an area of personal expertise. Deepening this understanding would allow me to create practical, ongoing resources for my students.

With this in mind, I intend to develop a guided mindfulness-based course specifically for singers and vocal students experiencing anxiety. Creating a means by which students can engage with daily, accessible mindfulness practice holds practical value for both learners and educators. Furthermore, I see this research as vital to my own ongoing professional development, offering a tangible opportunity to integrate

the disciplines of yoga and singing. Through the creation of this artefact, I aim to begin bridging these two professional domains.

Planned Programme of Study

Meditation's significance has made it one of the fastest growing areas of interest within behavioural sciences (Matko and Sedlmeier, 2019). Although meditation has originated from ancient Buddhist traditions (Ricard et al., 2014), where my own knowledge has been gained, scientific research can now document the benefits of mindfulness both quantitatively, through neuroimaging studies of meditators' brains, and qualitatively, by analysing participants' reported experiences in empirical studies. Meditation is gaining recognition as a valuable tool in the professional treatment (Butzer et al., 2016; Czajkowski et al., 2020; Lin et al., 2008) and self-management (Diaz, 2018; Hu, 2024; Suzuki and Pitts, 2024; Tahirbegi, 2019) of MPA. To understand exactly which meditative strategies are used to treat MPA, especially where perfectionism is considered, I undertook a brief overview of literature. It is evident why researchers have made efforts to call for a unifying taxonomy and classification system (Matko and Sedlmeier, 2019; Nash et al., 2013) of this 'family of complex practices' (Tang et al., 2015, p. 1).

Terminology and Classification

Many research studies use broad terms for meditation techniques under several other categories. For example terms such as 'complementary therapy' is used which is officially classified as anything that falls outside of mainstream healthcare (Blair and Van Der Sluis, 2022), 'yoga' (Diaz, 2018), or 'deep breathing' and 'positive thinking' (Hu, 2024) which are both vague, potentially misleading terms (Blyskal, 2022; Kaleńska-Rodzaj, 2021).

This ambiguity is evident not only in language but also in the interpretation of strategic methods. Pecen et al. (2018) note that students often confuse technical skills with psychological strategies, making it difficult to clearly identify the specific interventions being employed by students and teachers. Practices such as repeating affirmations or visualising outcomes are frequently grouped under the broad term 'meditation.' While these techniques are not inherently harmful, research suggests that for individuals with perfectionist tendencies or high trait anxiety, such generalised approaches may fail to meet specific psychological needs (Flett et al., 2021; Spahn et al., 2024).

Helpfully for this research project, Nash and Newberg (2023) contribute to a more unified theory of meditation by offering a clear theoretical foundation, distinct methodological categories, semantic precision, and applicability for future studies. Their overarching system classifies meditation into three primary domains: Cognitive Directed Methods (CDM), Affective Directed Methods (ADM), and the Null Domain Methods (NDM), which engages with neither cognitive nor affective content. These categories expand into more complex tiers, encompassing a wide range of meditation methods that cultivate different states throughout practice referred to as 'complex methods' (Nash and Newberg, 2023, p. 9).

The system delineates distinct neural correlates associated with each meditation type, highlighting their differential effects. While rooted in neuroscience, Nash and Newberg's (2023) model also incorporates traditional meditation practices, offering the most comprehensive and structured taxonomy available. This enhances the theoretical coherence and robustness of my analysis. In areas where disciplines diverge, particularly in the psychological dimensions of meditation, perfectionism, and music performance anxiety, I aim to integrate relevant practical outcomes into Nash and Newberg's classification framework.

What constitutes a Mindfulness Based Programme?

The following table, from Crane et al.'s (2017, p. 993) framework, outlines the essential ('warp') and adaptable ('weft') components of a mindfulness-based program and teacher. It serves both as a guide for the research I must undertake and as an assessment criterion for evaluating the knowledge that has informed my artefact.

Table 1. *The essential (warp) and flexible (weft) ingredients of MBPs*

Warp	Weft
MBP	
1. Is informed by theories and practices that draw from a confluence of contemplative traditions, science, and the major disciplines of medicine, psychology and education	1. The core essential curriculum elements are integrated with adapted curriculum elements, and tailored to specific contexts and populations
2. Is underpinned by a model of human experience which addresses the causes of human distress and the pathways to relieving it	2. Variations in program structure, length and delivery are formatted to fit the population and context
3. Develops a new relationship with experience characterized by present moment focus, decentering and an approach orientation	
4. Supports the development of greater attentional, emotional and behavioral self-regulation, as well as positive qualities such as compassion, wisdom, equanimity.	
5. Engages the participant in a sustained intensive training in mindfulness meditation practice, in an experiential inquiry-based learning process and in exercises to develop insight and understanding	
MBP teacher	
1. Has particular competencies which enable the effective delivery of the MBP	1. Has knowledge, experience and professional training related to the specialist populations that the mindfulness-based course will be delivered to
2. Has the capacity to embody the qualities and attitudes of mindfulness within the process of the teaching	2. Has knowledge of relevant underlying theoretical processes which underpin the teaching for particular contexts or populations
3. Has engaged in appropriate training and commits to ongoing good practice	
4. Is part of a participatory learning process with their students, clients or patients	

(Crane et al., 2017, p. 993)

Interdisciplinary Framework

My research draws from neuroscience, cognitive and performance psychology, and vocal pedagogy. I seek to understand the neurological mechanisms of meditation, the psychological dynamics of MPA and perfectionism, and the practical implications of different meditation approaches for beginners, particularly self-critical, perfectionist singers. Repko and Szostak (2017) advise refining manageable problem areas or questions to avoid too broad a scope. I recognise this is a potential danger in my current study. They helpfully describe 'systems thinking' to gather insight to identify 'different causal linkages' (Repko and Szostak, 2017, p. 164).

Neuroscientific and Cognitive Foundations

Initial scientific research reveals that while meditation can reduce anxiety and improve attention, it requires significant cognitive effort at the outset. This effort becomes more automated with practice (Gotink et al., 2016; Śliwowski et al., 2023; Tang et al., 2015, 2012; Zhang et al., 2021). Importantly, some methods of meditation may be more suitable for beginners, while others might be too cognitively demanding in early stages (Ferreira Afonso et al., 2020; Tang et al., 2015). Understanding this progression is crucial when designing interventions for anxious, perfectionist learners, who may be reluctant to engage in practices that prioritise present-moment awareness over measurable achievement (Flett et al., 2021).

Psychological Dimensions: Anxiety and Perfectionism

MPA and perfectionism are deeply intertwined, with causal linkages evident in shared cognitive mechanisms such as self-criticism, fear of negative evaluation, and ruminative thinking, actors that both exacerbate anxiety and sustain perfectionistic tendencies, especially in females (Patston and Osborne, 2016).

These traits are associated with high emotional reactivity and impaired self-regulation, key targets of meditation-based interventions. Meditation's role in addressing perfectionism is increasingly supported by research. Flett et al. (2021) highlight the importance of understanding how mindfulness can disrupt perfectionistic tendencies at their core. Kaleńska-Rodzaj (2021) stress the need for affect-centred mindfulness to target self-censorship and constant self-criticism, while Paese and Egermann (2024) argue that only socio-cognitive and compassion-based practices meaningfully impact shame-based, judgemental ruminations. These insights shape how I may select or adapt meditation practices for my students.

Pedagogical Implications and Practical Application

These psychological insights have practical relevance in vocal pedagogy. In music and vocal training, strategies such as positive thinking, focus, mental imagery, and emotional regulation strategies are often recommended for performance anxiety (Hu, 2024; Pecun et al., 2018). However, for perfectionist adult singers, these approaches may not sufficiently address self-critical thought patterns. Affective directed Methods rooted in self-compassion and acceptance, rather than control or performance enhancement, may offer more sustainable support (Paese and Egermann, 2024; Shahr et al., 2015).

Progressive Methods of Meditation

Awareness of how meditation develops over time is crucial for encouraging ongoing student engagement. Although students and teachers are calling for toolkits from which to resource themselves (Mazzarolo et al., 2023; Pecen et al., 2018; Suzuki and Pitts, 2024) these tools cannot be effectively selected without first clarifying the intended outcome. If, as some research contends, a single body scan offers little benefit for MPA (Gan et al., 2022) or, deep breathing alone is as effective as combined therapies (Brown et al., 2022), then a more critical examination of the evidence supporting singular versus combined approaches is needed to determine the most impactful strategy, particularly for what is likely to be a short-term introductory course.

Even within singular meditation practices, it may be possible, and indeed beneficial, to combine elements to maximise their effect (Nash, 2023). For example, breath control techniques, such as altering pace or introducing breath retention, can be integrated into basic mindfulness of breath practices to enhance their impact (Bhavanani et al., 2014; Campanelli et al., 2020; Turankar et al., 2013). In my own teaching experience, breath-based mindfulness is often used as a kind of emergency intervention or 'rescue mission' when a student becomes distressed. Paese and Egermann (2024) note that pranayama 'acts on the breath...at the edge of the 'involuntary system, even in...high tension' (2024, p. 10). This underscores breath regulation's impact on the autonomic nervous system.

While time constraints must be considered, my aim is to provide students with as comprehensive a programme as possible. Therefore, part of my research involves exploring how to maximise the layered effects of different meditation forms, especially those that combine physiological regulation with psychological grounding.

Best Practice and Novel Output

A review of the literature highlights several recurring practices in musical institutions and private practice: breath awareness (Czajkowski, 2018; Diaz, 2018; Gómez-López and Sánchez-Cabrero, 2023; Mazzarolo et al., 2023; Paese and Egermann, 2024; Ryan and Andrews, 2009), body scans often conflated with progressive muscle relaxation (Blair and Van Der Sluis, 2022; Czajkowski, 2018; Montero-Marin et al., 2019; Paese and Egermann, 2024), and affect-centred meditation, including loving-kindness and cognitive reframing through mindful acceptance (Czajkowski, 2018; Czajkowski and Greasley, 2015; Paese and Egermann, 2024).

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the practical design of a relevant intervention must reflect the experiences (Tahirbegi, 2019) and 'attitudes and preferences of the target population' (Suzuki and Pitts, 2024, p. 439). Current research highlights the preferences and limitations of meditation as a resource for students and singers, including time constraints (Suzuki and Pitts, 2024), stigma and language use (Paese and Egermann, 2024), perceived efficacy (Arbulu et al., 2024; Hu, 2024), and motivational barriers, particularly where perfectionistic self-presentation creates resistance (Flett et al., 2021). Studies also explore how these factors shape engagement and uptake in music education settings (Bačlija Sušić, 2018; Lee, 2016;

Moura and Serra, 2021; Sieger, 2017; Tahirbegi, 2019). By addressing these considerations, I hope to enhance the appeal of this work to my students and increase its relevance within the pedagogical community I belong to.

Available Resources

Initial online searches revealed a range of publicly available UK mindfulness resources, summarised in the table below. While not exhaustive, it highlights courses tailored to various needs, including singing, perfectionism, and general wellbeing.

Name of course	Provider	Singer specific	In person	On line	Series 8 weeks	Under 8 weeks	One off session	Cost	Immediate start	Wait list	Breath	Body scan	Visualisation	Open monitoring	LKC M	Yoga	Unspecified
8-Week Mindfulness for Health & Well-being MBSR	Sharpham Trust	☐	☐	☒	☒	☐	☐	☒	☐	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☐	☐	☐
Mindfulness for Stress Course MBSR	With Mindfulness	☐	☐	☒	☒	☐	☐	☒	☐	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☐	☐	☐
8-Week Mindful Self-Compassion Course	Mindful Living Community	☐	☐	☒	☒	☐	☐	☒	☐	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☐	☐
Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)	The Mindfulness Today	☐	☐	☒	☒	☐	☐	☒	☐	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☐
Mindfulness Courses	MS-UK	☐	☐	☒	☒	☒	☐	☒	☐	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☒
Mindfulness Courses MBSR/ MBCT	Mindfulness Sussex	☐	☐	☒	☒	☐	☐	☒	☐	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☐	☐
Mindfulness and Performance Anxiety for Professionals	Royal Irish Academy of Music (RIAM)	☒	☒	☐	☐	☒	☐	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☒
https://www.catherinekbrown.com/blogger/singing-mbsr	Catherine K Brown	☒	☐	☒	☒	☐	☐	☒	☐	☒	☒	☒	☒	☐	☒	☐	☐
MBSR	Vocal Health Education	☒	☐	☒	☐	☒	☐	☒	☐	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☒
Zoom bi-weekly MBSR Mfm M/S MSC UK based	Carola Emrich-Fisher	☒	☒	☒	☐	☒	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☒
The Thoughtful Singer	Allison Cook	☒	☐	☒	☐	☐	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☒
Compassionate Voice	Claire Turner	☒	☒	☒	☐	☐	☒	☐	☐	☐	☒	☐	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐
Perfectionism and Self-Love Course	Tiffany Roe	☐	☐	☒	☐	☐	☒	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☒
(I'm)perfect: Mindfulness for Perfectionists	Imperfect	☐	☐	☒	☐	☒	☐	☐	☐	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐	☒	☐	☒
Overcoming Perfectionism and Procrastination with Mindfulness CBT	London Mindful	☐	☒	☐	☐	☐	☒	☒	☐	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☒
Perfectionism: A Course To Break Free	Insight Timer	☐	☐	☒	☐	☒	☐	☐	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☒
Embracing Imperfection: A Course To Deal With Perfectionism	Insight Timer	☐	☐	☒	☐	☒	☐	☐	☒	☐	☒	☒	☒	☐	☒	☐	☐
Mindfulness Workbook for Perfectionism	New Harbinger Publications	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

There are seven singer-specific options available, often delivered online and shorter than eight weeks, with a focus on breathwork, self-compassion, and emotional regulation. The most comprehensive evidence based MPA free resource is Anne-Marie Czajkowski's 8 week 'Mindfulness for Singers Course' (Czajkowski et al., 2021; Czajkowski, 2018; Czajkowski and Greasley, 2015). The course was not designed specifically for perfectionism or self-criticism, though evidence shows it helped with perfectionistic distress.

In contrast, six general mindfulness programmes follow a more structured 8-week MBSR or MBCT format, offering practices like body scans, breath awareness, visualisation, and open monitoring. Though not designed specifically for singers, they can support performance anxiety and perfectionistic tendencies. For those targeting perfectionism more directly, six flexible, mostly online or app-based courses are available, incorporating mindfulness with CBT or self-compassion practices. In-person options are limited, with only the Royal Irish Academy of Music and The Mindfulness Today offering face-to-face components. While many self-guided or

app-based resources allow for immediate start, live MBSR-style courses may involve waitlists and scheduled cohorts and cost between £200-£300.

I have not included YouTube references for mindfulness due to the sheer volume available, but I found that most videos targeting performance anxiety incorporate breathwork and visualisation with a strong emphasis on pre-performance nerves. Many are standalone, compassion focused sessions, guided by mindfulness-trained practitioners such as Jon Kabat-Zinn, Kristin Neff, and Dr Kate Truitt. A common feature is that these videos are typically one-off rather than part of a series, and those belonging to a series are very difficult to navigate sequentially. While I could simply direct students to existing resources, the trust they place in me makes a personalised approach more impactful (Mazzarolo et al., 2023; Suzuki and Pitts, 2024). Therapists similarly record tailored sessions for clients due to the significance of this trust (Luoma and LeJeune, 2017).

Methodology

As an insider researcher, I adopt a constructivist viewpoint that truth is subjectively experienced and, at times, understood through collectively applied meaning (Crawford, 2019). The nature of MPA as both 'state' and 'trait' suggests it arises from a blend of genetic disposition, personal history, and socially constructed experience (Kenny et al., 2004), making it highly individualised (Spahn et al., 2021). As a teacher, I infer knowledge (Scott, 2024, p. 149) by interpreting my students' experiential realities (Chilisa and Kawulich, 2015) and assigning meaning to them (Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006). This positions me within a largely interpretivist research paradigm.

This project seeks to surface implicit knowledge, allowing the 'disequilibration' of new insights to contextualise and shape emerging understanding (Crawford, 2019, p. 456), to make explicit what was once inferred. A potential risk lies in personal bias, particularly the influence of familiar yogic terminology, which must be addressed by recognising both tensions and overlaps between disciplines (Repko and Szostak, 2017). To manage this, I will periodically revisit earlier stages of inquiry, using reflective 'feedback loops' to iteratively refine my insights and lines of questioning (Repko and Szostak, 2017).

Interpretation of data

This leads me to take a hermeneutic approach to methodology (Boell and Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2014, 2010). Here, I bring my 'pre-understanding' (Laverly, 2003, p. 24) to the text, but through a dialectical interaction of questioning and understanding, I aim to expand my limited horizon and uncover emerging meaning (Polkinghorne, 1989). Interdisciplinary research, as described by Repko and Szostak (2017), is heuristic and reflexive rather than linear, marked by continual decision-making and problem reformulation. I expect my research question to evolve, as I identify key insights and disciplinary contributions. Alongside academic enquiry, I will engage in active experimentation, acting and observing 'real world effects' through my own practice and methods, as well as through the lived experiences of others (Repko and Szostak, 2017, p. 209).

Methods to build artefact

Tying in with my methodological viewpoint I will take a mixed methods approach to data search and acquisition to balance both the qualitative experiential data with the science based qualitative evidence. Even if science proves a position, deliverability and mobilisation of these concepts depends largely on the human psyche.

My exclusion criteria vary depending on the type of data being analysed. For empirical and grey literature, I aim to prioritise current peer-reviewed publications, given the breadth of the field. However, older landmark texts will be included where they remain influential. For white or popular sources, I seek material supported by respected practitioner-scholars such as Jon Kabat-Zinn and Kristin Neff, or foundational texts, such as ancient yogic or Buddhist writings that have informed subsequent research.

Sources from regulated platforms like Yoga Alliance or Yoga International are also considered valuable, as they typically feature contributions from leading researchers and practitioners. In areas where academic literature is limited, I will assess findings based on their alignment with established practice, the insights of recognised experts, and widely accepted teachings. This approach reflects interpretive and pragmatic research traditions, which value triangulating sources and integrating experiential knowledge to enhance both validity and credibility (Denzin, 1978; Patton, 2002). Such reflexive evaluation ensures the findings are theoretically sound and practically relevant.

Search methods

I will search google scholar, Voice Study Centre Library and University of Wales library. Key search terms will include 'meditation +' and 'mindfulness +' MPA, anxiety, perfectionism, performance teaching strategies, music student coping strategies, self-led practice, neural correlates, beginner meditation, advanced practice, combined mindfulness programmes.

An initial overview of the literature highlights key academic systematic reviews (Blair and Van Der Sluis, 2022; Fox et al., 2016; Kinney et al., 2025; Mazzarolo et al., 2023) from which I hope to build an initial literature chain. I also feel that Paese et al. (2024) serves as a key paper from which to build an initial overview of the experts' opinions of meditation specifically regarding counteracting perfectionism and self-criticism.

Practical input

Transitioning from academic research to the creation of the artefact will require the use of grey and white literature, including non-peer-reviewed texts and practitioner-based resources. As noted, a significant portion of philosophical and practical guidance on meditation is drawn from traditional yogic sources. The work of Kabat-Zinn (2021, 2018), and Neff (1996), is especially valuable, as it bridges peer reviewed academic literature and practitioner focussed writings, providing a rigorous

yet accessible foundation for applied methods. Their contributions, alongside those of other meditation educators, will help identify which meditation techniques best serve the artefact's aims.

In addition, the implementation and design of the resource will draw on insights from popular media, including YouTube, Instagram, and widely used mindfulness apps such as Calm, Peloton, and Headspace. These sources provide practical models for tone, structure, and accessibility. My own ongoing meditation practice will also inform the process; as a novice meditator, I can reflect directly on the common challenges faced by beginners.

Bias

I will exclude studies with methodological flaws or those not supported by peer reviews. Tang et al. (2015) caution that meditation research often shows bias toward positive outcomes, with small samples, limited variable control, and few longitudinal studies. To minimise personal bias, I will adopt an iterative reflective approach, using journaling and voice notes to document my responses to the process, including any resistance to or affinity with particular information.

Aims and objectives

Aims

The aim of this study is to bridge my two professional practices of yoga and singing by exploring how meditation can provide ongoing mental health benefits for singers suffering from MPA, particularly those with perfectionistic traits. While acknowledging that meditation is an ancient tradition with well-established roots, this project seeks to discover the additional theories and practices from science, psychology, and education that may inform and underpin a more comprehensive mindfulness-based programme.

Objectives:

- To synthesise research from contemplative traditions, psychology, and neuroscience in order to identify meditation methods that effectively support emotional regulation, particularly in individuals with perfectionistic tendencies.
- To evaluate evidence-based meditation styles that promote sustained engagement, present-moment awareness, and an approach-oriented mindset, suitable for ongoing use (Kaleńska-Rodzaj, 2021).
- To design a meditation sequence for singers that is grounded in both philosophical insight and psychological theory, addressing underlying causes of distress and supporting a shift in the performer's relationship to internal experience.
- To develop and present this sequence in an accessible, user-friendly format that incorporates mindfulness principles, experiential inquiry, and repeated practice, supporting real-world application in performance contexts.

Assessment Criteria

By the end of this module, I should be able to:

- Demonstrate an understanding of how meditation mediates the four symptom domains of MPA (Kaleńska-Rodzaj, 2021), with specific attention to its application for perfectionistic performers.
- Critically assess the categorisation of meditation practices and determine which 'methods' and associated 'states' (Fox et al., 2016; Nash et al., 2013) are best suited for this demographic.
- Produce a usable and evidence-informed meditation tool that supports ongoing mental health for singers, not merely as a crisis intervention, but as a way of cultivating a more mindful and sustainable performance mindset (Kabat-Zinn et al., 1996).
- Ensure that the tool is accessible, broadly relevant, and psychologically attuned to the needs of singers who struggle with perfectionism-driven MPA.

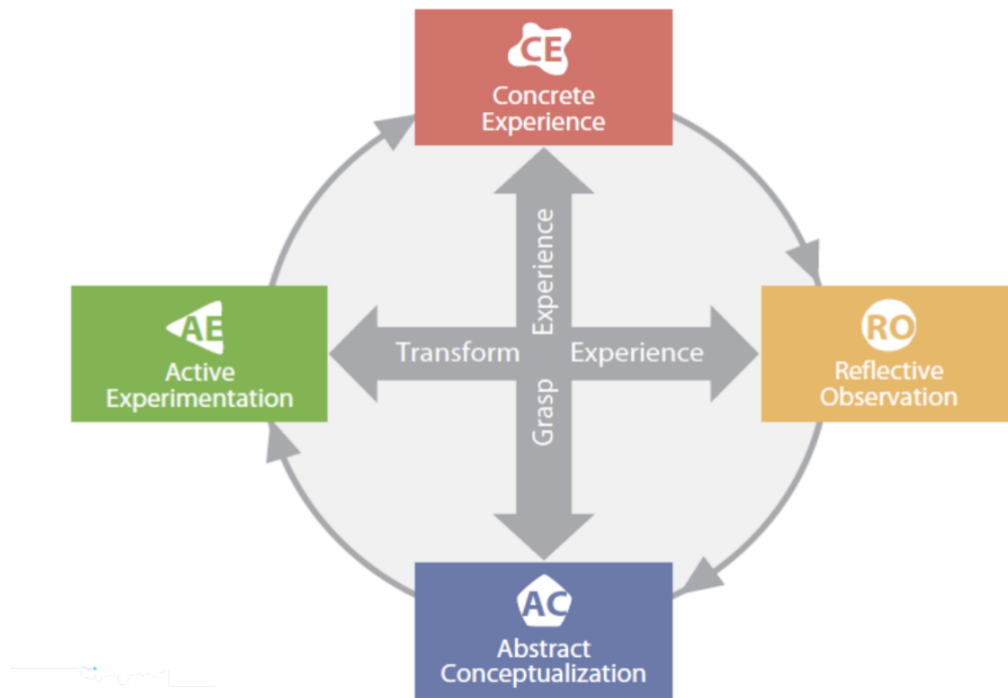
Proposed Timeline of Study

TASK	Jan 1, 15	Jan 15-29	Jan-30 Feb 13	Feb 14-28	March 1-15	March 16-31	Apr 1 - 15	Apr 16 - 30	May 1- 12	May 12th	May 13-20	May 21 - June 2	June 2
Research the problem													
Agree topic and artefact													
Assignment plan													
Rationale WWH													
Reading and research													
Writing component 2													
Drafting Artefact													
Creating Artefact													
Reflective													
Draft Submission													
Refine and revise													
Final submission													

Reflective Review

The following reflective review is laid out using Kolb's Learning Cycle which allows for the reflective process of evaluating my current practice, assessing the gaps and areas of development and outlaying the next steps towards artifact development.

Figure 2. The Experiential Learning Cycle



Experiential Learning Cycle (Kolb and Kolb, 2013, p. 8)

Concrete experience

As a private vocal teacher, I have utilised performance training that incorporates ‘macro level’ educational strategies (Gill et al., 2024; Mazzarolo et al., 2023; Moura and Serra, 2021). This may include positive mindset discussions, positive feedback, and varied and autonomous practice. As a teacher for an NHS funded socially prescribed choir, breath work and mindful body scan became a routine part of our practice and was one of the groups most self-reported enjoyable activities. Here, I incorporate both breathwork and body scans, though their distinct neural targets and differential neurocognitive and affective effects remain unclear to me. Also, within my teaching studio I have utilised yogic breath work such as alternate nostril breathing to try to rescue an emotionally overwhelmed student on several occasions. However, all these moments have been instinctive and based on prior yogic training but have had very few research supported methodological foundations. What I have chosen to utilise in lessons has been largely in reaction to a presented problem. Nothing I currently use for 1-2-1 students is proactive or aimed at the long-term self-practice.

Reflective Observation

Although I recognise from experience that mindfulness and singing complement each other, reflection on my current practice reveals two key barriers that have limited my confidence in integrating them more fully.

First, I lack a cross-contextual understanding that links traditional yogic practices with empirical research on mindfulness, particularly as it relates to performance

anxiety and perfectionism. Communicating mindfulness techniques to students based solely on generalised spiritual knowledge feels ethically and pedagogically inadequate. Without a clear grasp of the psychological underpinnings of perfectionism and anxiety, I risk applying techniques inappropriately. While organisations such as The British Association of Mindfulness-Based Approaches (BAMBA) provide guidelines for safe practice, meditation remains an unregulated field in the UK. Gaining deeper insight into the mechanisms by which mindfulness affects self-regulation and wellbeing is therefore crucial to making ethically sound and practically effective decisions.

The second challenge lies in translating spiritually or existentially framed practices into accessible, secular language appropriate for a singing studio. Research suggests that stigma, shame, and unfamiliar terminology can prevent students from seeking support, especially when mindfulness is perceived as an alternative or unconventional intervention (Bačlija Sušić, 2018; Mazzarolo et al., 2023; Paese and Egermann, 2024; Suzuki and Pitts, 2024). While my delivery style may be well suited to a yoga class, I am still learning how to adapt this to meet the needs of voice students. Without a stronger understanding of the evidence base for specific mindfulness practices, I do not yet feel confident in offering a structured and supportive solution for those experiencing MPA.

Abstract Conceptualisation

While I have previously explored the causes and effects of MPA, I now shift focus to understanding how perfectionism contributes to cognitive patterns such as negative self-talk and rumination patterns that meditation may help address (Diaz, 2018; Flett et al., 2021; Ryan et al., 2024). Many of my students appear unable to disengage from self-critical thoughts, consistent with literature linking MPA to maladaptive cognition (Short & Mazmanian, 2013; Tang et al., 2015).

Although I have long understood meditation through a yogic lens, I now seek to align this with empirical perspectives. The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali describe ‘dhyana’ (meditation) as sustained awareness, but this arises only after preparatory practices such as breath regulation, sensory withdrawal, and focused concentration (Iyengar, 1965; Nash and Newberg, 2023). These stages mirror cognitive and attentional mechanisms under study in mindfulness research.

Singer and Engert (2019) highlight the importance of matching meditation types to desired outcomes, which is especially relevant when considering interventions for self-critical singers. As attention improves, experienced meditators show differing neural responses than novices (Ferreira Afonso et al., 2020; Hölzel et al., 2011b; Lazar et al., 2005; Pasquini et al., 2015). I aim to integrate emerging evidence with personal experience, remaining open to findings that challenge prior assumptions.

Active experimentation

Traditionally meditation is understood through philosophical narrative for example, the concept of *prāṇa* or breath being understood as a life force or energy, or notions of 'pure consciousness' (Schleim, 2025) relating to the inner 'atman' or true self. These concepts are hard to translate into western concepts and often do not align neatly with scientific models, leading to reinterpretation or omission in scientific studies (Gupta and Dhawan, 2022). My current understanding could certainly lead to preference and bias of these traditional explanations and therefore I feel that my methodological approach should be to look at empirical findings first to help develop adequacy across disciplines (Repko and Szostak, 2017, p. 156). Finding common ground, and divergencies between disciplines may help reduce the myriads of paths I could take towards the practical implementation of meditation.

The potential breadth of enquiry has impacts upon time constraints. I need to find a way to gain concise empirically supported information across various fields. I intend to initially choose key words combined in search engines to be as specific as possible. For example, meditation + perfectionism + MPA. I will build a literature thread from key academic papers that helps me understand the neuroscience of meditation succinctly such as Tang et al's 2015 The Neuroscience of Mindfulness Meditation. Systematic reviews will help contextualise and consolidate the wealth of research both within the pedagogical domain (Blair and Van Der Sluis, 2022; Gan et al., 2022; Ghiya, 2017; Mazzarolo et al., 2023) and the psychological field (Bentley et al., 2023; Flett et al., 2021; Gan et al., 2022; Ghiya, 2017). There are researchers who specifically aim to identify the relationship between traditional practices and science (Sen and Deidda, 2018) and who offer theoretical models that address heterogeneous methodologies and linguistic modalities (Nash et al., 2013; Singer and Engert, 2019). By adhering to established theoretical models I hope to pull my selection of practices into a framework that can be situated beside existing research (Dingle et al., 2019; Nash et al., 2013).

Academic research contributes empirical knowledge, while practitioners inform methodological application. I believe that traditional teachers of meditation hold the most insight into method implementation, and so they must serve significantly to inform the artefacts practical functionality. I am a member of Yoga International and Yoga Alliance and have access to lectures, classes, articles and links to lead practitioner sites. I also intend to actively experiment with my own mindfulness practice. Positioning myself as an insider researcher allows me to generate practice-based insights that bridge teacher and student experiences. I intend to keep a diary or voice notes following different practices to log what salient features I find and what difficulties I faced. This I hope will inform inclusion and exclusion criteria as I engage in a continued learning cycle (Kolb, 2014; Kolb and Kolb, 2013).

COMPONENT 2

Literature Review and Programme Design

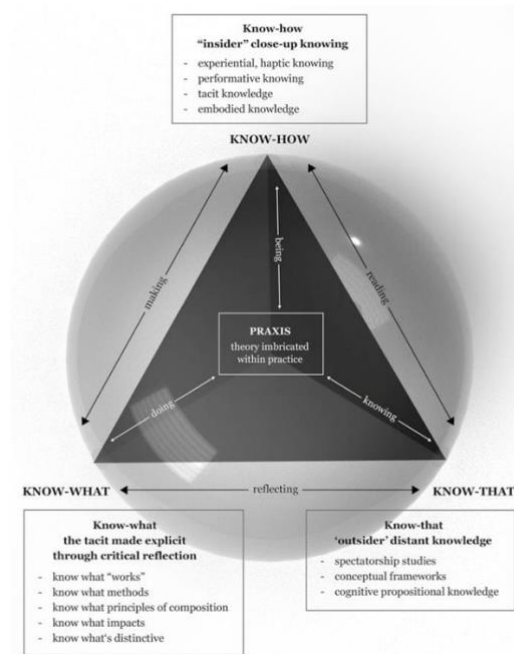
Introduction

Music Performance Anxiety (MPA) is currently classified under Social Anxiety Disorder in the DSM-5. Research indicates that up to one third of musicians are significantly affected (Gómez-López and Sánchez-Cabrero, 2023), exhibiting cognitive distress, physiological symptoms, emotional suffering, and behaviours such as avoidance or compulsive training (Kenny et al., 2012; Kinney et al., 2025). Self-oriented perfectionism (SOP) and socially prescribed perfectionism (SPP) are recognised predictors of elevated MPA levels (Diaz, 2018; Kobori et al., 2011; Ryan et al., 2024). While cognitive therapy with exposure is the most effective treatment (Kenny, 2011; Shaw et al., 2020), only around 15% of sufferers seek help (Kinney et al., 2025). In training settings, students often rely on high-cost coping strategies like avoidance and fear suppression (Kaleńska-Rodzaj, 2021).

Beyond clinical treatments, students and teachers increasingly call for accessible, practical resources. As such, MPA remains an 'unresolved issue' across both academic and professional domains (Gómez-López and Sánchez-Cabrero, 2023).

My own experience with MPA led me to explore mindfulness practices such as yoga and meditation, where I found lasting relief. While my training focused on philosophical aspects, often through a Buddhist lens, I have yet to fully explore how these methods align with scientific evidence or how they might be adapted for secular, student-friendly delivery.

This review explores how mindfulness strategies can address perfectionistic MPA, examining the specific symptoms targeted by different meditation forms and considering how an accessible, impactful programme might be designed for singers. The discussion is structured in three parts, following Nelson's praxis framework, which emphasises the integration of theory and practice throughout the learning process (Nelson, 2022).



Model of Know-What, Know-How, and Know-That (Nelson, 2022, p. 46)

Know That

To 'disseminate' knowing that is currently tacit and proximal, I begin with 'Know That', aiming to identify and articulate key, more distal explicit knowledge (Nelson, 2022, p. 47). These are the key academic theories and insights pertaining to the disciplines of MPA, Perfectionism and Mindfulness.

What Mindfulness Is

John kabbat-Zinn defines mindfulness as 'paying attention in a particular way, on purpose, in the present-moment and non-judgmentally' (Blyskal, 2022, p. 80). Mindful meditation works specifically in the case of MPA to help disentangle the fusion of the perceived self, from thought and rigid self-concept (Paese and Egermann, 2024; Shaw et al., 2020) a process that will be discussed later. It is both a separation from self-precept (self-concept) and a unification of body and mind where there has been disconnect in the present-moment (Paese and Egermann, 2024).

Understanding that mindful meditation is an active, engaging process is essential for selecting appropriate methods. Unlike relaxation techniques such as progressive muscle relaxation, which lower autonomic arousal and have a fixed outcome, mindful meditation fosters interest, engagement, and acceptance of all mental, emotional, and physical states (Kabat-Zinn et al., 1996). It is a process of unfolding awareness (Bodhi, 1995). My own method choices reflect this active understanding.

Perfectionism-Driven MPA and the Role of Self-Referential Thinking

Experts suggest that MPA-related distress stems from over-identification with thoughts and emotions, where individuals fuse with internal states rather than recognising them as transient experiences (Brown et al., 2022; Hölzel et al., 2011; Tang et al., 2015). In Buddhist philosophy, this is described as a 'static self-concept' (Hölzel et al., 2011). For perfectionists, this fusion is compounded by a drive to suppress the authentic self and present an idealised self-image (Flett et al., 2021; Zheng et al., 2020).

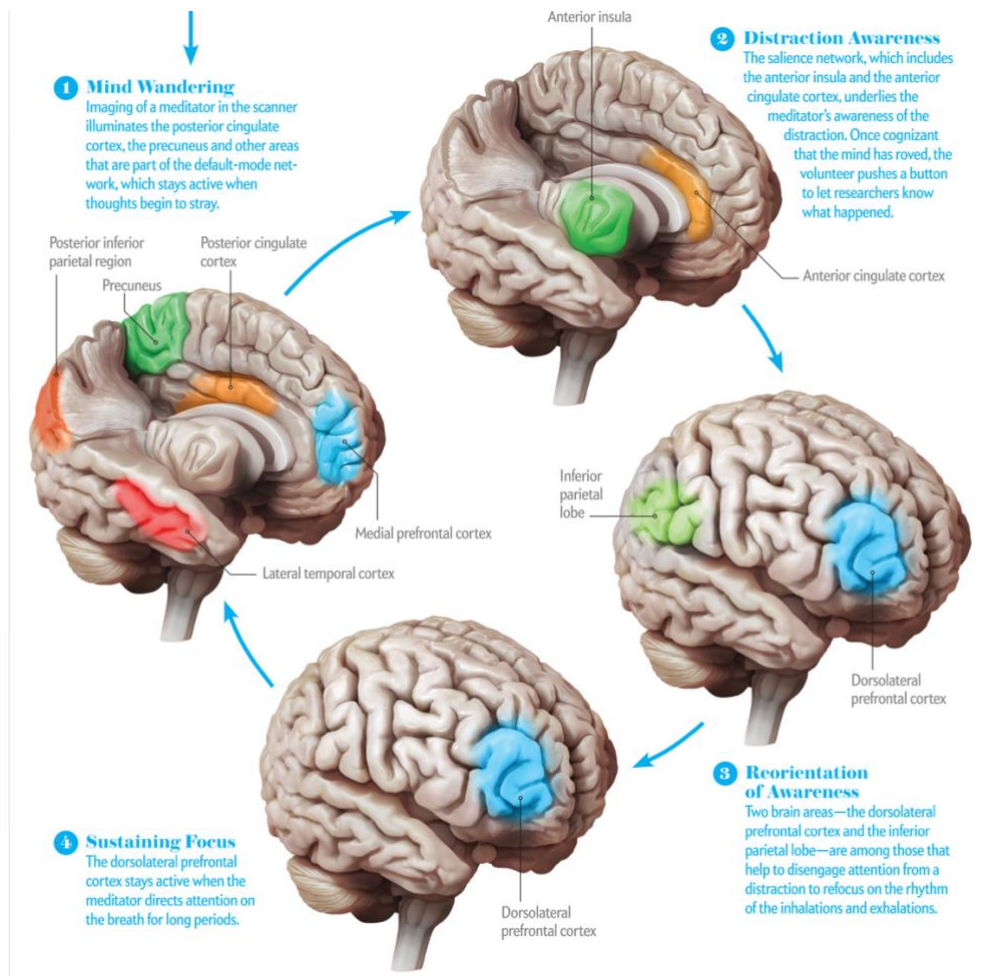
Meditation cultivates meta-awareness (awareness of awareness) enabling detachment from fixed self-concepts and reinforcing the transience of all experience (Hölzel et al., 2011, p. 537). As rumination contributes to perfectionistic distress (Flett et al., 2021; Short and Mazmanian, 2013), meditation supports relief by addressing cognitive fusion, false self-representation, and persistent self-criticism (Carson and Langer, 2006; Flett et al., 2021; Short and Mazmanian, 2013; Zheng et al., 2020).

Mechanisms of Attention

It is hypothesised that the default mode network (DMN) plays a central role in self-referential processing (Hölzel et al., 2011b). The DMN is typically active during mind wandering, linking the perceived self to external experiences. For individuals with perfectionistic tendencies, this heightened self-focus often results in distraction and cognitive rigidity, driven by DMN dominance (Xie et al., 2019). When a perceived threat to the self arises, such as anticipated judgment from an audience, the DMN becomes overactive, undermining objective assessment. In these moments, the prefrontal cortex no longer signals safety and instead communicates threat to the amygdala (Hölzel et al., 2013), initiating the fight or flight response. As Paese and Egermann (2024, p. 7) note, 'the mind is no longer present.' The sympathetic nervous system (SNS) is activated, triggering physiological changes such as increased heart rate, elevated blood pressure, muscle tension, and rapid breathing (Osborne and Kirsner, 2022). In this state, threats appear magnified, and the capacity to reorient or problem-solve becomes severely impaired (Brown et al., 2012; Garland et al., 2011).

Present-Moment Awareness and Emotional Regulation for Beginners

The core components of meditation appear to be attention control, emotion regulation and self-awareness (Tang et al., 2015). In simple terms, meditation helps individuals engage in a cycle of alerting, orienting, and conflict monitoring (Ricard et al., 2014) involving 8 key brain regions (Tang et al., 2015).



Neural activity during meditation (Ricard et al., 2014, p. 41).

The diagram above illustrates how recognising automatic thoughts and observing rising distractions can activate prefrontal brain regions associated with objective awareness (Kaleńska-Rodzaj, 2021; Marchand, 2014; Ricard et al., 2014). As meditation practice deepens, structural brain changes begin to emerge, as demonstrated in comparative studies between novice and experienced meditators (Ferreira Afonso et al., 2020; Lazar et al., 2005; Tang et al., 2015). These changes include increased parasympathetic dominance (Carmody and Baer, 2008; Ding et al., 2015; Ditto et al., 2006; Guthrie et al., 2022; Hölzel et al., 2011b), enhanced cross-network integration, and reduced amygdala reactivity (Doll et al., 2016; Ferreira Afonso et al., 2020; Luo et al., 2025; Marchand, 2014).

Over time, it is hypothesised that the appraisal and acceptance of stimuli becomes more automatic (Hölzel et al., 2011a; Leung et al., 2013; Pasquini et al., 2015; Tang et al., 2015), allowing practitioners to more effectively tolerate, reframe, and accurately identify perceived negative emotions (Brown et al., 2022; Kaleńska-Rodzaj, 2021). In the context of performance anxiety, this shift supports a move away from appraising pre-performance emotions as purely negative, toward recognising their mixed and potentially facilitative nature (Kaleńska-Rodzaj, 2021). As noted in prior research on perfectionism, such emotional flexibility is often impaired in those with perfectionistic tendencies, who are prone to rigid negative self-appraisals and emotional suppression (Flett et al., 2021). Meditation, therefore, appears to reduce

threat perception, encourage more adaptive emotional appraisals, and improve responses in socially evaluative situations (Brown et al., 2012; Garland et al., 2011).

Cognitive-Directed Methods (CDM)

Beginners, especially perfectionists resistant to self-evaluation (Flett et al., 2021) often find advanced practices in the 'null domain' (Nash & Newberg, 2023) challenging. While these non-cognitive, non-affective techniques effectively reduce perfectionistic and judgmental tendencies (Bankard, 2015; Diaz, 2018; Paese & Eggermann, 2024; Shahar et al., 2015), they require sustained attentional control and are therefore beyond the scope of this introductory programme.

Instead, cognitively demanding focused attention (FA) strategies (Matko & Sedlmeier, 2019; Śliwowski et al., 2023; Tang et al., 2015) are more appropriate. CDMs (Nash et al., 2013) support sustained concentration by activating prefrontal brain regions (Ferreira Afonso et al., 2020; Kok & Singer, 2011), enhancing interoceptive processing (Gotink et al., 2016; Guthrie et al., 2022; Mirams et al., 2013), and enabling clearer emotional labelling (Sauer-Zavala et al., 2013). These approaches reduce reactive emotional habits (Tang et al., 2015) and align with widely used MPA management strategies (Czajkowski et al., 2021, 2022; Diaz, 2018; Kenny et al., 2012; Mazzarolo et al., 2023; Pecen et al., 2018; Suzuki & Pitts, 2024; Tahirbegi, 2019).

The primary form of CDM is breath-focused practice, ranging from simple breath observation (Chui et al., 2021) to structured techniques like breath restraint and slowed breathing, which offer greater physiological and regulatory benefits (Balban et al., 2023; Bar-Anan et al., 2009; Komori, 2018; Kusumah et al., 2022; Luo et al., 2025; Weng et al., 2020). Progressive CDMs include body-based practices like body scans, which enhance interoceptive awareness and promote a safe, non-judgemental experience of the body (Gunaratana, 2012). While the effects of single sessions are often self-reported (Singer & Engert, 2019), evidence suggests that body scan practices may yield broader and more sustained benefits over time compared to breath-focused methods (Kok and Singer, 2017; Ng et al., 2021; Sauer-Zavala et al., 2013).

Affective Directed Methods (ADM)

Affective Directed Methods use emotionally focused mental content to guide attention and are designed to elicit affective states that support emotional regulation (Feliu-Soler et al., 2017; Kaleńska-Rodzaj, 2021; Zheng et al., 2020). Nash et al. (2023) classify these as 'complex methods' due to their ability to generate enhanced mental states beyond basic cognitive techniques. Loving-Kindness and Compassion Meditations (LKCM) in particular have shown efficacy in reducing self-criticism and perfectionistic rumination by fostering warmth, empathy, and social safety (Fredrickson et al., 2008; Fredrickson and Branigan, 2005; Lucre and Corten, 2013; Shahar et al., 2015). Importantly, Zheng et al. (2023) demonstrated that integrating LKCM with mindfulness practice yields superior outcomes compared to either approach alone, supporting its inclusion in structured mindfulness programmes.

Combinations of Meditation Techniques and Duration

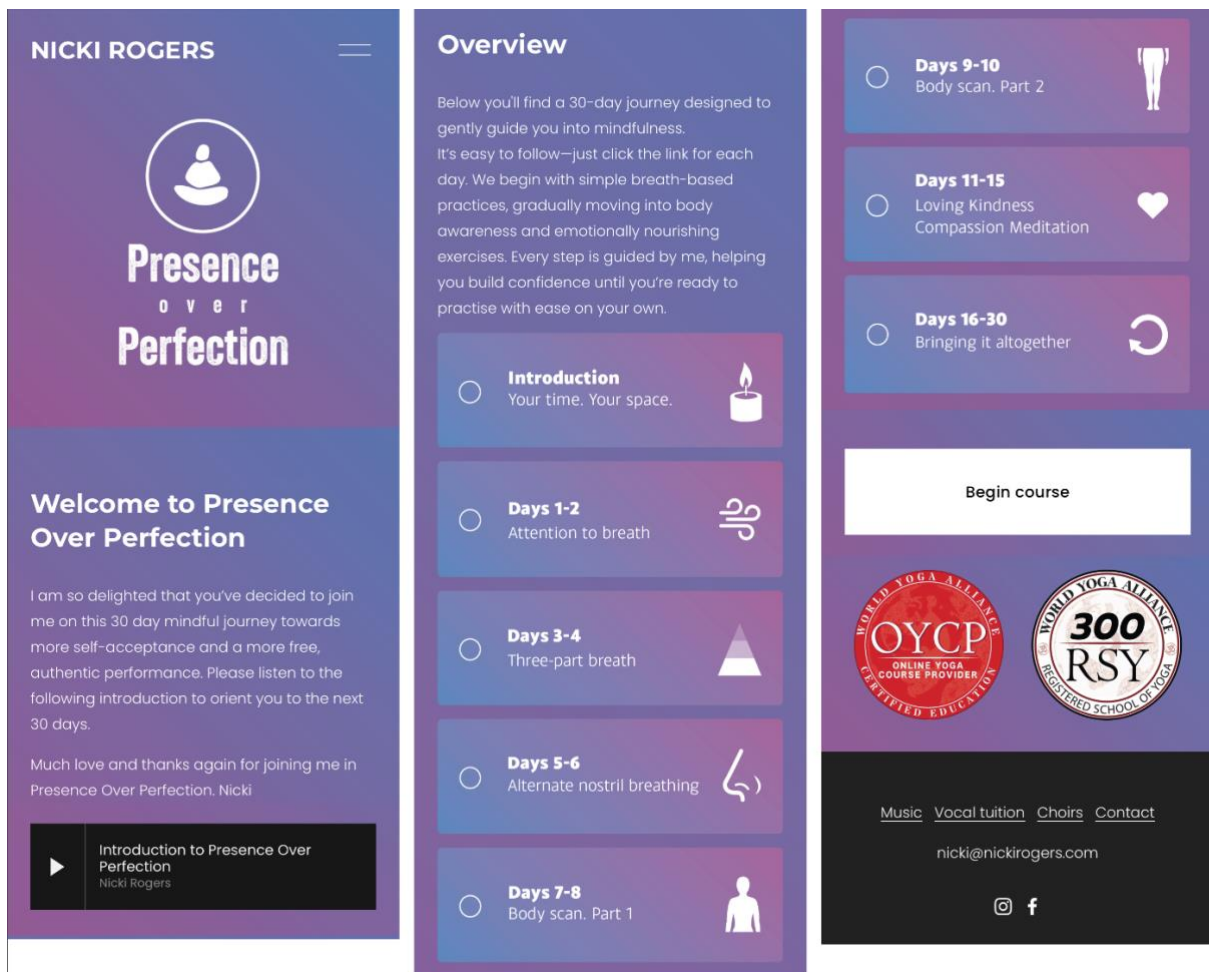
While some evidence supports single-technique meditation (Brown et al., 2022; Doll et al., 2016; Hölzel et al., 2011b), most programmes combine progressive methods for broader and faster effects (Sauer-Zavala et al., 2013; Van Gordon et al., 2015; Gotink et al., 2016; Xue et al., 2011). This reflects the traditional stages of mindfulness training: awareness of the body, feelings, mind, and mental objects, as outlined in the Satipatthāna Sutta (Bodhi, 1995), each forming a foundation for deeper insight and emotional regulation. Sustained practice over 6–8 weeks is commonly recommended to build state mindfulness (Carmody and Baer, 2009; Crane et al., 2017; Czajkowski, 2018; Kabat-Zinn, 2016; Kabat-Zinn et al., 1996), with daily sessions typically lasting 20–45 minutes (Allen et al., 2012; Bankard, 2015; Czajkowski, 2018; Czajkowski et al., 2022; Fischer et al., 2017; Gotink et al., 2016; Santorelli, 2014; Xue et al., 2011; Yang, 2020). My introductory course focuses on accessible cognitive and affective directed methods (Nash et al., 2013; Singer & Engert, 2019), offering students foundational tools for independent practice (Pecen et al., 2018).

Know How

‘Know How’ centres on the procedural knowledge and embodied skills enacted through the artefact. Here, I present a detailed, day-by-day unfolding of the practical implementation of my mindfulness course with reference to the ‘know that’ explicit knowledge embedded to inform and shape the delivery.

Programme Overview and Daily Implementation

The following section lays out 30-day mindfulness programme delivered via an interactive website. This format encourages regular practice, allows for tracking progress, and fosters habitual, or even ritualised engagement (Liu et al., 2022; Tian et al., 2018). The programme integrates three cognitive-based approaches into a progressive ‘unified meditation practice’ (Allen et al., 2012, p. 15602; Nash et al., 2013).



Currie, 2025, illustration

As an example, the website lays out a clear trajectory of the 30-day journey with icons reflecting core methods on page 1.

Each grouped session has its own track player which shows as played once completed (see Appendix 1.1).

To motivate perfectionist students, the course uses a goal-oriented structure (Pecen et al., 2018), which though seemingly at odds with meditation's process-based ethos, helps engage those with activity-based self-esteem who may resist unstructured methods (Flett et al., 2021).

Session length grows over the 30 days, beginning with 10 minutes and peaking at around 25 minutes.

Introduction to programme Structure

Participants are invited to begin by creating a comfortable, sensory-rich environment, one that feels both welcoming and supports alert awareness (Kabat-Zinn, 2016; Nash et al., 2013). A brief invitation to commit to regular practice follows, highlighting the well-documented benefits of consistent mindfulness (Santorelli, 2014).

Secondly, as many students find spiritual language alienating (Paese & Egermann, 2024; Suzuki & Pitts, 2024), this course adopts everyday language and humour to promote ease and engagement (Czajkowski, 2018; Pecun et al., 2018; Quidbach et al., 2015; Sieger, 2017). Terms like 'focus' and 'mindfulness' are mainly used in place of 'meditation,' and learners are encouraged to practise in familiar surroundings to foster comfort and approachability (Liu and Rice, 2019; Norton, 2024). The script also highlights that replacing stress-driven habits like over-practice or rumination with mindfulness can enhance productivity, as supported by research and performer experience (Carson and Langer, 2006).

Background music has been used throughout using royalty free selections (Strawberry Candy Music, 2023), with no distinct melody (Liu and Rice, 2019).

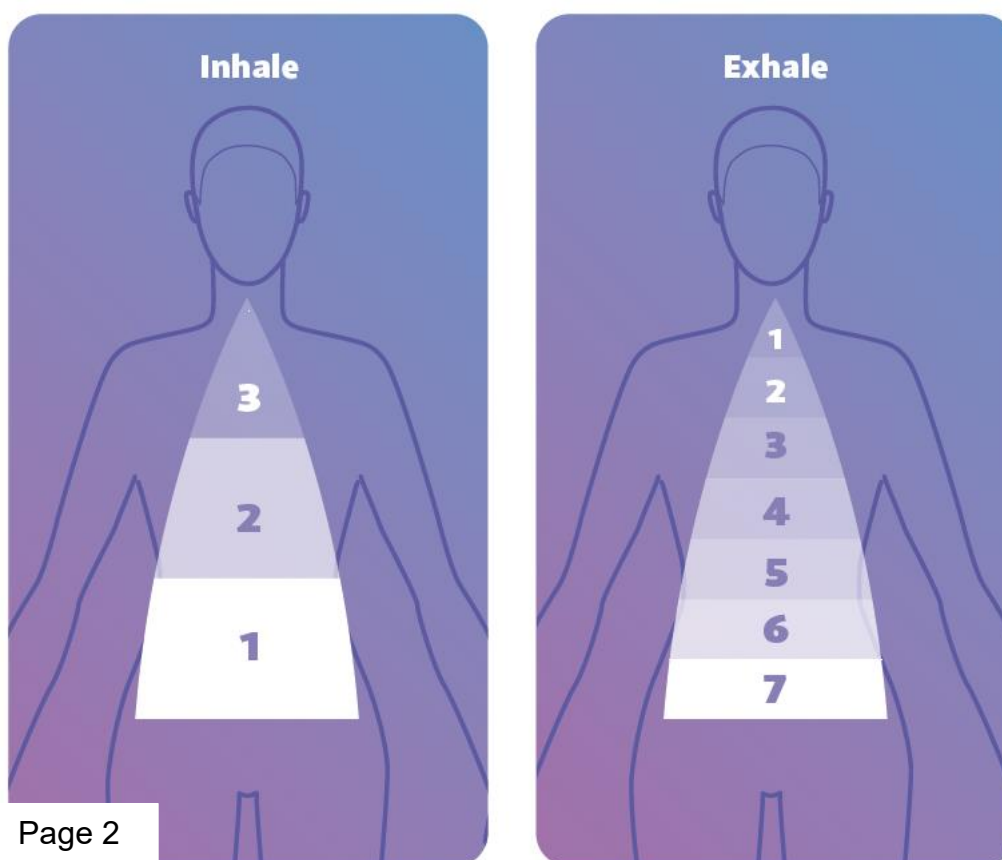
Clear warnings are included advising individuals with depression, addiction, or untreatable diagnoses to consult a specialist before beginning the programme (Czajkowski, 2018; Dreeben et al., 2013; Santorelli, 2014).

Just Breathe (Days 1–2)

Focus is given to commitment to begin the session by metaphorically clearing the 'room' or mind, and arriving in the present-moment activating the volitional initial stage of meditation (Nash et al., 2013; Tang et al., 2015),

Participants are invited to focus on the breath, using it as an immediate and accessible anchor for the mind. To introduce the concept of mind-wandering, the emphasis is on noticing when attention drifts and gently returning it to the breath, without any attempt to alter it (Doll et al., 2016; Ricard et al., 2014; Tang et al., 2015, 2019; Xue et al., 2011). The tone and language of the session align with MBCT-style delivery: invitational, non-directive, and compassionately guided (Hayes et al., 2011). Physical positioning (e.g., seated posture, optional tactile anchoring via hand placement) enhances embodiment, and interoceptive awareness (Farb et al., 2013) while the inclusion of a one-minute silent period supports self-directed practice and consolidation.

Breathe Deeply (Days 3–4)



(Adapted from Gilbert, 1999, p. 46; Currie, 2025, illustration)

To deepen breath awareness, a yogic three-part breath exercise is introduced on Days 3–4. To clarify the concept of breath expansion and incorporate respiratory rate, I developed a revised visual model based on Gilbert et al. (1999, p. 46).

Traditionally, this technique uses an equal inhale/exhale ratio, promoting diaphragmatic engagement and respiratory stability (Gilbert, 1999; Komori, 2018; Kusumah et al., 2022). In this intervention, however, I adopt a reduced ratio with an extended exhale to enhance both physiological and psychological outcomes (Balban et al., 2023; Birdee et al., 2023; Luo et al., 2025; Van Diest et al., 2014). Following a period of slowing the breath (Shannahoff-Khalsa et al., 2004; Balban et al., 2023; Komori, 2018; Kusumah et al., 2022; Luo et al., 2025; Weng et al., 2020), participants move through the three areas of the ‘triangular flow’ at a self-regulated pace, guided rather than prescribed by what feels sustainable for them (Kabat-Zinn, 2016).

Regulate Breathing (Days 5–6)

Breathwork culminates on days 5 and 6 with alternate nostril breathing (Nadi Shodhana). As a progressive breath meditation, Nadi Shodhana reduces stress and enhances mental clarity, supporting deeper meditation practices (Mohammed et al., 2024), therefore, it is practiced regularly from day 5 of the course.

Heart rate variability (HRV) studies show that right nostril breathing tends to increase sympathetic activity, while left nostril breathing enhances parasympathetic activity, highlighting how nostril-specific breathing modulates autonomic function (Pal, 2017). This physiological effect aligns with yogic philosophy, which describes 'heat' and 'cool' energies flowing through the nadis, or energy channels, corresponding to the right and left nostrils respectively.

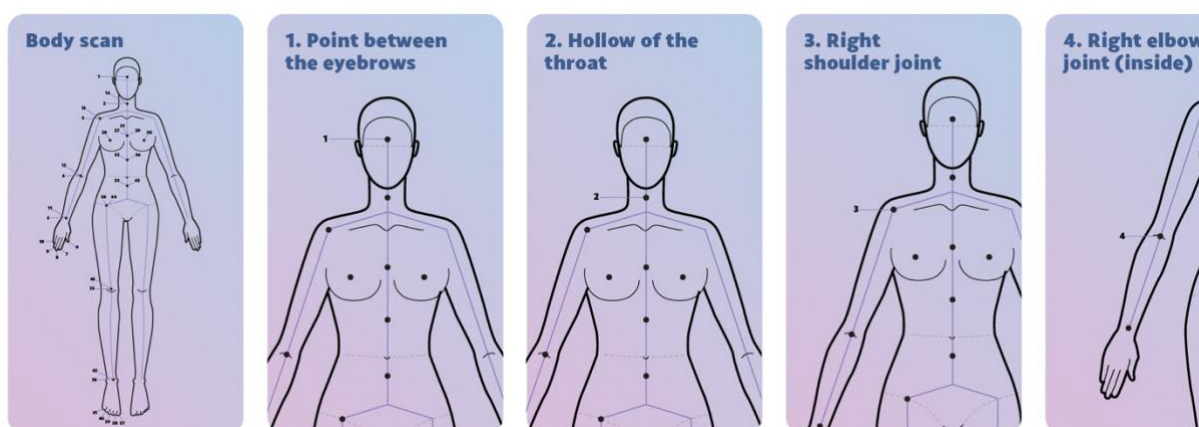
Additionally, I include variations in breath retention (Kumbhaka) at the top and bottom of the respiratory cycle to further improve autonomic regulation and increase parasympathetic tone (Bhavanani et al., 2014).

As a motivational point, participants are encouraged to practice regularly, as research shows that just one week of consistent practice reduces the body's 'fight or flight' response, helping individuals feel calmer and more relaxed during times of usual stress or alertness (Ghiya, 2017; Turankar et al., 2013). A caution advises avoiding this practice during colds or nasal congestion (Pal, 2017).

Body-Centred Practice (Days 7–14)

At this stage, the student's mind is likely still prone to distraction, making the body scan an effective method to focus and redirect attention (Dreeben et al., 2013; Kok and Singer, 2017; Ng et al., 2021). Following on from an initial daily breath focussed meditation, a body centred meditation is introduced. The 61-point body scan, or *Shavayatra* 'travelling through the corpse' (Insight Timer., 2016; Sharma et al., 2018) was selected over the broader sweeping scans used in MBSR (Dreeben et al., 2013) for its more directive inward focus on highly innervated areas (Farb et al., 2013; Fischer et al., 2017; Guthrie et al., 2022).

Body scans have been shown to reduce sympathetic arousal (Carmody and Baer, 2008; Ditto et al., 2006; Fischer et al., 2017; Guthrie et al., 2022), however, participants who experience discomfort with more advanced techniques are reassured that such reactions are a normal part of the process (Cebolla et al., 2017; Czajkowski, 2018; Kabat-Zinn et al., 1996), and that they are free to pause, adjust or take breaks at any time (Savich, 2009, p. 62).



(Adapted from Sharma et al., 2018, p. 157; Currie, M., 2025, illustration)

An adapted visual guide, based on the original by Sharma et al. (2018, p. 157) has been created to support clearer understanding of the 61-point body scan. Repeated points have been removed for simplicity, and a full list with precise locations is available on the course website (see Appendix 1.2).

This practice is performed lying on the ground to encourage full tension release. Scripted prompts guide the scan at a slow pace (Dreeben et al., 2013), with 31 points completed over the first two days, before progressing to the full 61-point scan. The meditation highlights the transitory nature of reality, emphasising that what we hold in our minds, we can also release (Paese and Egermann, 2024). Throughout this section, the breathing rate is maintained at an optimal pace of approximately 6-8 breaths per minute (Balban et al., 2023).

LKCM Introduction (Days 11–15)

LKCM, derived from ancient Buddhist traditions, has been adapted for modern psychological interventions (Feliu-Soler et al., 2017). Many versions exist for practitioners and nonclinical populations, all fostering compassion and goodwill. For my resource, I have chosen a cautious approach, advised by Luoma and LeJeune (2017a) to support the highly self-critical who may find invoking warmth and safety overwhelming or triggering.

We begin by exploring several personal ‘touch points’ of warmth, love, and kindness, experiences that evoke a sense of connection, compassion, or acceptance (Luoma and LeJeune, 2017b). These reflections help establish an emotional foundation for later compassion-based practices. For guidance on identifying these touch points, see Appendix 2. LKCM practice is introduced with a focus on a friend and a stranger (Days 1–2), then directed towards a challenging person or situation—such as a feared performance, critical figure, or even the singer’s own voice—on Days 3–4, before concluding with a focus on self-compassion on Day 5. All scripts are adapted in my own words but are based on those by Luoma and LeJeune (2017c) (see Appendix 3).

Rotation and Habit Formation (Days 15–30)

After completing the first three stages of the programme, participants follow a recommended rotating schedule of mindfulness practices (see Appendix 1.3). A simple selection tool supports balanced rotation, for example, pairing a breath-based meditation with either a body scan or a LKCM. This varied structure promotes habit formation while allowing flexibility (Sauer-Zavala et al., 2013).

Know What

The formation of this artefact, a 30-day mindfulness course for singers experiencing perfectionism and MPA was shaped by a combination of experiential know-how and empirical research. It responds to a recognised gap between the philosophical and practical foundations of mindfulness and the expanding psychological and neuroscientific literature supporting its application for MPA, especially in perfectionism-driven presentations.

The structure of the course is informed by current evidence connecting the four key domains of MPA: cognitive distress, physiological arousal, emotional suffering, and behavioural avoidance (Kenny et al., 2012; Kinney et al., 2025), with specific meditation strategies. Focused attention (FA) techniques, introduced in the early days of the course, support the reduction of distressing rumination and intrusive thoughts (Flett et al., 2021; Xie et al., 2019), while also targeting physiological regulation (Osborne and Kirsner, 2022). These have been shown to offer both short-term benefits (Balban et al., 2023; Ng et al., 2021) and longer-term improvements in attentional control and stress resilience (Singer and Engert, 2019).

Later stages of the course incorporate affect-centred approaches, particularly compassion-focused practices. These meditations respond directly to the emotional distress and inner criticism that underlie perfectionistic tendencies, a core feature of MPA (Diaz, 2018; Feliu-Soler et al., 2017; Kaleńska-Rodzaj, 2021; Zheng et al., 2023). Compassion-based practices were chosen not only for their empirical support but because of their practical impact when trialled experientially. One example includes the adaptation of LKCM to imagine the voice itself as the 'difficult person', a personal practice that enabled greater emotional softness and reduced reactivity toward critical inner narratives.

Together, these practices form the scaffold of the artefact, gradually addressing the spectrum of MPA symptoms by guiding the practitioner from nervous system regulation and stabilised attention toward emotional resilience and more accepting self-perception. This progressive structure reflects both the empirical trajectory of mindfulness development and my own lived experience trialling the work.

The content and delivery of the 30-day course have been shaped by compassion research and informed by the psychological profile of perfectionists. Research into perfectionistic concern highlights the difficulty many have with vulnerability (ACT With Compassion, 2017; Besser et al., 2010; Flett et al., 2021), which led me to emphasise compassionate language in my guided meditations. I avoided directive language, favouring invitation and non-striving to maintain alignment with MBSR principles (Crane et al., 2017; Dreeben et al., 2013). In adapting LKCM scripts, I also considered participants who may lack strong positive relational memories (Luoma and LeJeune, 2017), by adding 'touch points' taken from 'History of compassion and connection experiences' (Luoma and LeJeune, 2017) (see Appendix 2) and adjusting the structure so that self-directed phrases come later, thereby reducing perceived threat (Flett et al., 2021).

Although the broader literature on perfectionism and MPA includes individual factors such as personality style and coping mechanisms (Osborne and Kirsner, 2022; Spahn et al., 2021), this artefact maintains a streamlined focus. I acknowledge that this course does not seek to address the total complexity of MPA but instead provides a specific, accessible, and emotionally safe introduction to evidence-informed mindfulness practices.

This tool is intended not only for acute moments of distress but to foster a sustainable and mindful performance mindset. Course content is delivered in secular, accessible language and is available in multimodal formats, audio, written prompts, and visual guidance (Alabi, 2024) to support diverse learning preferences.

The tone throughout remains light and encouraging to counterbalance the emotional intensity often associated with perfectionism (Czajkowski et al., 2022).

There are, however, clear limitations. As a self-guided resource, the course cannot offer the therapeutic holding or support typically available in a facilitated setting. Eight weeks is the recommended amount of time for an intense mindfulness course (Carmody and Baer, 2009) and as such this artefact stands as an introduction to mindfulness and provides a tool kit for singers to use on an ongoing basis. Its tone, pace, and secular format may not suit everyone. Nonetheless, the artefact offers a timely, compassionately structured, and research-informed resource for singers living at the intersection of performance, anxiety, and perfectionism.

Reflective Conclusion

Concrete Experience

When embarking on this module, I recognised several areas of my practice that required deeper exploration. Initially, I struggled to define a clear question; however, as my understanding of mindfulness, perfectionism, and MPA broadened through research, my question naturally began to refine itself. Although I originally considered developing a single mindfulness practice, it quickly became clear that this would not adequately address the layered nature of mindfulness progression or the complexity of MPA. This realisation led me to design a more comprehensive, 30-day course, a shift that introduced challenges in terms of both time constraints and scope.

Finding definitive criteria for what constitutes a robust mindfulness course helped ground the direction of my study (Crane et al., 2017). Through academic engagement with the literature, I was able to integrate my implicit, lived experience of meditation with a more structured understanding of how and why such practices are effective. This, in turn, revealed gaps in my practical knowledge, particularly in areas like LKCM, which I had not used regularly before. The need to incorporate LKCM, as highlighted consistently across the theoretical, empirical, and experiential strands of my study, required me to lean into practical experimentation to shape and deliver the artefact effectively.

Reflective Observation

One of the most rewarding insights during this phase was recognising the parallels between neuroscientific models of meditation progression and the yogic kosha system. Both frameworks describe a transition from outer to subtler layers of experience. For example, focused attention practices align with the physical and breath sheaths (Annamaya and Prāṇamaya), while affect-centred meditations correspond with the emotional body (Manomaya). More advanced practices reflect the wisdom and bliss layers (Vijñānamaya and Ānandamaya), which resonate with contemporary 'null domain' techniques that cultivate non-dual awareness.

These models, scientific and philosophical, reinforced the value of integrating these perspectives into the course. I was particularly struck by how left and right nostril breathing practices, as described in yogic systems (via the nāḍīs), correspond with measurable autonomic nervous system responses. While I had previously felt the benefits of these practices in an intuitive, experiential sense, this phase offered a more comprehensive understanding of why they work, deepening both my confidence and the theoretical grounding of the artefact.

Abstract Conceptualisation

This project was initially driven by a desire to explore whether mindfulness-based practices could provide a structured, accessible, and compassionate intervention for singers experiencing perfectionism and MPA. By creating a 30-day mindfulness course, I aimed to blend empirical insight with lived experience to deliver an artefact grounded in both psychological relevance and spiritual depth.

In many ways, the artefact achieved what I set out to do. The design reflects current thinking on MPA symptom clusters and maps these to appropriate meditation types, progressing from stabilisation to affective integration. Furthermore, the course takes care to use psychologically safe language and pacing, making it inclusive for participants with high self-criticism or trauma sensitivity.

However, one of the most stressful and underestimated aspects of this process was the production of daily recorded sessions. Unlike a live class, which allows space for mistakes and improvisation, recorded content requires clarity, technical precision, and a polished flow. As a non-technical sound editor, I had to accept that the quality would fall short of commercial meditation platforms, and more time than anticipated would be needed for editing and track compilation. My aspiration is to deliver a user experience comparable to platforms like 'Headspace' where participants can easily follow and remain engaged throughout the 30 days. This goal has necessarily slowed full completion. Nonetheless, the website is now complete, and functionally sound (see hyperlink in appendix).

Active Experimentation.

Time limitations, and my own time management, proved to be the most significant challenge in this process. In hindsight, had I fully understood the depth and complexity of each individual component: MPA, perfectionism, and mindfulness, I may have chosen to narrow my focus more intentionally from the outset. Attempting to address all three domains in a single artefact has likely resulted in a more generalised course, one that acknowledges key psychological and emotional patterns, but does not specialise in any single domain with absolute depth.

The course has not yet been tested in its entirety with participants; however, I have facilitated group classes for performance anxiety in the lead-up to recent performances, using adapted practices from the artefact. Although I have not been permitted to collect formal data, verbal feedback from students has been consistently positive, with many responding well to specific exercises. This offers encouraging anecdotal evidence that the artefact is grounded in lived relevance, even as it remains in refinement.

While I hope this project serves as a foundation for future research and development, I recognise that more work is needed, particularly around objective measurement and evaluation. In future iterations, it will be essential to understand and integrate appropriate outcome measures and tools to assess the impact of the course, both qualitatively and quantitatively.

A remaining issue is that while individual mindfulness sessions are developing well and do reference singing and performance, the connections between each practice and its intended performance outcomes could be more clearly articulated. Although the programme is grounded in addressing anxiety and stress, it does not yet consistently demonstrate how mindfulness facilitates freer, more expressive, or embodied vocal performance. Strengthening these links—both linguistically and pedagogically—within the guided sessions could significantly enhance the course's relevance and effectiveness for singers. Future iterations of this course could benefit from closer integration with Nash and Newberg's (2021) taxonomy framework, offering greater validity, stronger alignment with current research, and a more robust basis for future testing and evaluation.

This artefact has confirmed for me the urgent need for psychologically sensitive, compassion-based resources that meet performers in their striving.

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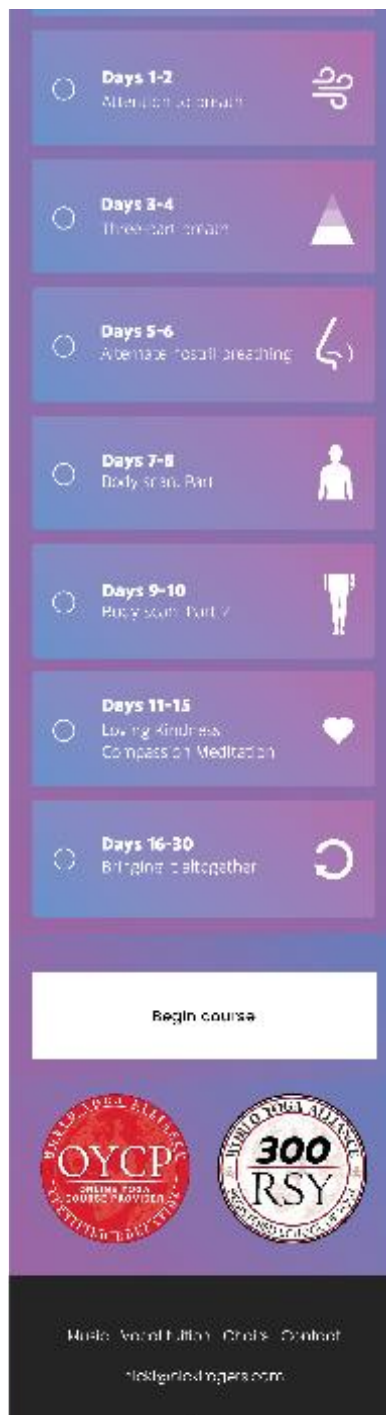
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Appendix 1.1 Presence over Perfection Course Overview

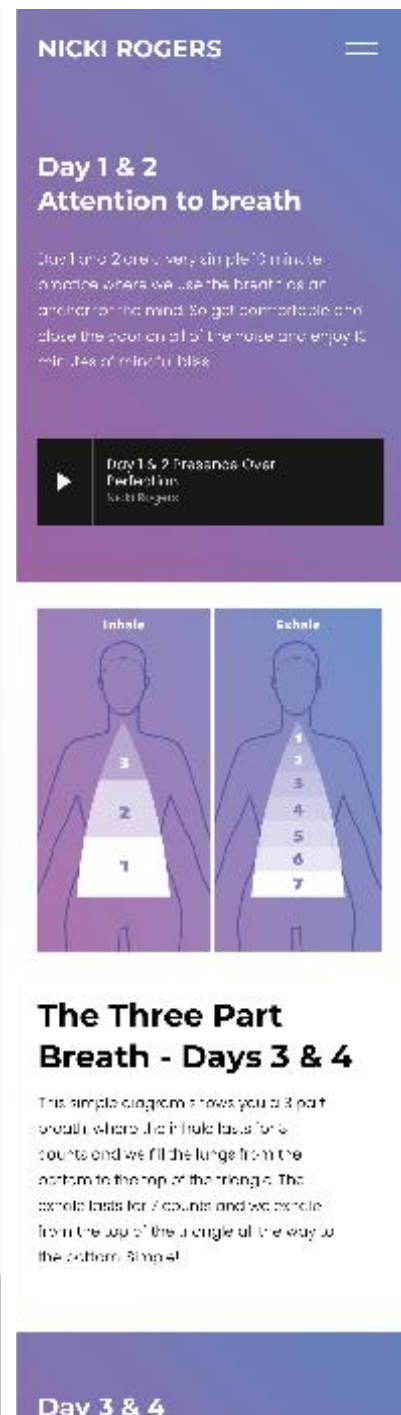
Please view and listen to the course at <https://www.nickirogers.com/mindful>



Web page 1



Web page 1



Web page 2

Appendix 1.2

Day 3 & 4

Attention to breath

This is a yoga three part breath exercise that is amazing for singers for so many reasons, not only will you be engaging diaphragmatic, thoracic and clavicular full breath cycles, but you'll also be calming your nervous system and regulating your emotions.

Day 3 & 4 Three Part Breath
Nadi Rogers

Day 5 & 6

Alternate Nostril Breathing - Nadi Shodhana

This is a FANTASTIC breathing exercise that will bring total balance to your nervous system and prepare you for any performance. Practice this every day and you'll notice the benefits in no time at all!

Day 5 & 6 Alternate Nostril Breathing
Nadi Rogers

Body scan

This simple diagram shows the points of focus used during the full body scan. On Days 1 and 2 we explore the upper body, by Days 3 and 4 we move through the full body.

Days 3 and 4 we move through the full body. This example: L indicates the right side—identical points are followed on the left.

Day 7 & 8

Half Body Scan

Are you ready to bring your body to the party? Find a nice yoga mat and take a look at the following graphic. Before you start your first session to orientate yourself around the 30 points that we focus on today.

Day 7 & 8 Half body scan
Nadi Rogers

Day 9 & 10

Full Body Scan

We will take a full body scan. Find a nice yoga mat and take a look at the following graphic before you start your first session to orientate yourself around the 60 points that we focus on today.

Day 9 & 10 Full body scan
Nadi Rogers

Day 11 & 12

Loving Kindness and Compassion Meditation

In this first LKM we will be focusing in a little more on the emotions. We'll start with focussing on a friend and then a more remote person.

Day 11 & 12 LKM Friend and Stranger
Nadi Rogers

Day 13 & 14

Loving Kindness and

Day 11 & 12 LKM Friend and Stranger
Nadi Rogers

Day 13 & 14

Loving Kindness and Compassion Meditation

In this LKM we move towards a friend and a more challenging situation or person.

Day 13 & 14 LKM Friend and more challenging situation or person
Nadi Rogers

Day 15

Loving Kindness and Compassion Meditation

In this LKM we finally focus in on self compassion.

Day 15 LKM self Compassion
Nadi Rogers

Days 16-30

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Appendix 1.3

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DAYS 16-30

Schedule

As we enter the third week of the course, it's time to start applying the techniques you've learned more independently. Don't worry! I'll still be guiding you through each session.

Below you'll find a suggested schedule of daily mindfulness practices. Simply click on the relevant player each day to continue.

Remember, you're always welcome to revisit any previous session if you'd like to recap or start again.

Look forward to seeing you on Day 31. Let's keep going!

Day 16	Alternate Nostril Breathing	Loving Kindness and Compassion Meditation
Day 17	Alternate Nostril Breathing	Full Body Scan
Day 18	Three Part Breath	Full Body Scan

16	22	26	28	30	ANS	DKCM
20	25	26	29	-	ANS	FBS
21	24	27	-	-	TNB	FBS

Alternate Nostril Breathing - Nadi Shodhana

▶

Nadi Shodhana/Alternate Nostril Breathing
Nick Rogers

Three Part Breath

▶

Three Part Breath
Nick Rogers

Full Body Scan

▶

Full Body Scan
Nick Rogers

Body scan

This simple diagram shows you a 3 part breath, where the whole body for 4 counts and we fill the lungs from the bottom to the top of the triangle. The exhale lasts for 4 counts and we exhale from the top of the triangle all the way to the bottom. Simple!

Loving Kindness and Compassion Meditation

▶

Loving Kindness Meditation
On-going
Nick Rogers

Back to days 1-15

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Appendix 2

Touch Points for warmth and safety in relationships taken from Luoma and Lejeune, 2017b.

Handout: Your Experience of Warm and Supportive Relationships

Please use this form so that we can get a better understanding of some of the warm and supportive relationships you may have had in the past and currently.

1. Who, if anyone, in your family (parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, etc.), would you say treated you with warmth, kindness, or affection as you were growing up? How would you describe those people to someone who had never met them? How did they show you they cared about you?
2. As you grew up, did you ever have any excellent teachers, mentors, or coaches who really cared about you and wanted you to do well? If so, please write some about who those people were and the way they treated you.
3. Did you ever have friends or other people such as neighbors or acquaintances that were warm, caring, or supportive to you? If so, please describe those relationships.
4. Have you had pets or other animals that you loved and that you felt cared for you in return? What did it feel like to be cared for by that animal?
5. Did you have religious or spiritual experiences with a warm or loving God or other spiritual experience where you felt loved, connected, or part of something larger than yourself? If so, describe these experiences.
6. Did you ever have periods of life or situations where you felt you felt like they fit in or were valued, for example, as a summer camp, on particular vacations, at church, in a social group, or during particular activities (e.g., sports)? If so, please describe those experiences and how it felt to be a part of that experience.
7. Were there any other ways that you received feelings of warmth, comfort, love, or safety when you needed them?
8. Finally, how does it feel when you spend time thinking about and reflecting on these experiences you may have had or not had in the past? As you reflect on these experiences, what do you wish might have been different for you if anything?

Appendix 3

LKCM sample scripts taken from Luoma and LeJeune, 2017b.

Lovingkindness for a friend and a stranger

Give yourself a moment to settle into your chair. Sitting in a dignified posture that is at once awake and relaxed. (Pause)...If it is right for you to let your eyes close, go ahead and close them, or you can keep them open with a soft gaze.

Allow your arms and legs to be held down by gravity... let your hands rest on your lap or the arms of the chair... let your feet be supported by the floor...(Pause)...

And turning your attention to the sensation of inflow and outflow of breath. Noticing the sensation of breath in the belly, the rise and fall of the chest, the air at the tips of the nostrils, or the body as a whole sitting here breathing. (Pause)...Just allowing the breath to move with its own rhythm as you follow it.

Let's again start by bringing to mind a time when you experienced a sense of warmth, connection, or safety with another being. You can choose a situation you have already chosen before, or you can choose one you have not yet used.... Let that situation come to mind...If your mind is having trouble settling on a situation to choose, just choose the first one that comes to mind. Let yourself drop into that moment in your mind. What do you feel...? See...? Smell...? Taste...? Hear?... Notice what it feels like in your heart center, if there is any curve of a smile wanting to form on your face. If not, that is quite okay. It is the intention to practice that matters.

Next, bring to mind the image of someone you care about, have warm feelings toward, or feel a sense of positive connection to. The basic idea is to find someone you already have existing warm feelings toward.

As best you can, try to get an image or sense of that person in your mind's eye. You might imagine you are with that person, like guardian angel, as they go about their daily activities or you might imagine they are here with you. Now, we will begin to wish this being well by extending words of kindness to them. I'll be offering some phrases as guidance. You're invited to use these phrases or choose whatever words work to express your wishes of love or kindness toward this being.

And now, using these phrases or ones of your own choosing, silently repeat to yourself:

May you be well

May you be kind to yourself

May you be joyful

May you be safe and at ease

And again, while you say these phrases, allow yourself to connect with the intention that they express:

May you be well

May you be kind to yourself

Appendix 3

May you be joyful

May you be safe and at ease

And again, extending wishes of kindness and warmth toward this person you care about:

May you be well

May you be kind to yourself

May you be joyful

May you be safe and at ease

Next, I'd like to invite you to imagine someone you don't know very well. A relative stranger, but someone you've at least met before, like a grocery store clerk. As best you can, hold an image of that person in your mind's eye.

And now, using these phrases or ones of your own choosing, silently repeat to yourself:

May you be well

May you be kind to yourself

May you be joyful

May you be safe and at ease

Again, holding the image of this person in your heart, extending wishes of kindness and warmth toward this person:

May you be well

May you be kind to yourself

May you be joyful

May you be safe and at ease

Lovingkindness for a difficult person

Next, I'd like to invite you to imagine someone you don't get along with very easily. It may be someone you have had difficulties with for a long time, or it may be someone who is usually easier to get along with, but you have difficulties with them right now... Call this difficult person to mind. If your relationship with yourself is difficult at the moment, you may choose to use yourself in this practice right now... to practice offering kindness to the part of yourself that you struggle with. Be honest with what you feel, opening up your heart to whatever is there without making it bigger or trying to get rid of it... Notice any tendency you have to think badly of the person or any tendency to make the difficult feelings bigger, and let go of those tendencies.

Instead, wish them well, silently repeat phrases of kindness to yourself. I am going to use the word "you" in these phrases, but you may direct them either to someone else or to yourself, whatever is right for you right now.

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May you be well

May you be kind to yourself

May you be joyful

May you be safe and at ease

Again, holding the image of this person in your heart, extending wishes of kindness and warmth toward this person:

May you be well

May you be kind to yourself

May you be joyful

May you be safe and at ease

For another minute or so I'll be silent and let you gently repeat phrases like this or other phrases of kindness while picturing this person in your mind's eye. Some people like to time the phrases with their outbreath, others don't. It's up to you.

Lovingkindness for yourself

For a few moments now, I'd like you gently consider a statement, sensing the truth of it ... "I want to be happy...Or maybe it's I want to live a meaningful life, a full life. Or maybe just be free from suffering. Or experience peace. Something like that. See if that is true for you that these are experiences you want in your life. [pause]

And then consider the following thought, "you don't experience happiness as much as you want to. Happiness is elusive." Many times in your life, you've set off to do something expecting it to bring you happiness -- a new relationship, a new job, only to find it was much more complicated than that. Happiness is elusive and suffering tends to come along unexpectedly and more often than we'd like. That's true of all of us. See if you can accept the truth of this situation for all of us. We all want to be happy and yet it's hard to achieve....There may be a sense of hurt, heartache as we encounter this truth. Maybe a sense of tenderness or vulnerability. That's OK. This is a recognition that we are doing something difficult in being human. Being a human being is not easy.

Now sense if there is some part of you that can offer some support, some kindness on this difficult path of being human. Letting this kind, supportive, compassionate part of you wish you well.

Offering words of support to yourself like the following, or making up your own:

May I be well

May I be kind to myself

May I be joyful

May I be safe and at ease

Appendix 3

or to yourself, whatever is right for you right now.

Again, giving yourself support, empathy, kindness as you journey this path of a human life. Perhaps placing a hand on your heart if that feels right to you and repeating:

May I be well

May I be kind to myself

May I be joyful

May I be safe and at ease

For another couple minutes or so I'll be silent and let you continue to wish yourself well. You may gently repeat these same phrases to yourself, or you may generate your own. Whatever feels like a way to offer yourself support. [pause for one minute and then say] If your mind has wandered, that's normal. If you can do so gently, just return your attention to this intention to be supportive of yourself and back to some phrases of kindness and support. [let one more minute pass]