



Inside-Outside Presence

An exercise in simultaneous attentiveness to self and other

BEING | Presence

→ What you will need:

- 👤 2-25
- 📋 Individual & group
- 🕒 30 mins preparation
- 🕒 3-5 sessions, 10-20 mins per step

→ Menu:

- I. Overview
- II. Learning Activity
- III. Assessment
- IV. Key Advice



“Often, when we notice our bodies – a skill that is highly relevant in each context, not just on a yoga mat, for instance – we tend to place ourselves in a bubble. This tool helps to burst this bubble: being aware of ourselves, while also connecting with and engaging in our environment and with other bodies, human and non-human.

–Ulrike Scholtes





I. Overview

While many meditation techniques are designed to be practiced in quiet and peaceful environments, it can be challenging to apply these same techniques in the midst of work situations in daily life. Yet in these situations, the ability to be present is a valuable skill that helps to recognise our boundaries and how we relate to our surroundings.

This tool can be used in any course to help students stay present and self-aware while actively engaging with their surroundings. Particularly useful applications are in interviews or fieldwork, lab experiments, patient interactions, presentations and classrooms where fostering connections between peers is crucial.

Learning outcome

- ✓ The student is able to be in a state of open-ended presence and aware of oneself while actively engaging with their surroundings





II. Learning Activity

The student practices a series of techniques to become aware of physical sensations while staying actively involved with their surroundings.



1. Introducing Inside-Outside Presence 10 mins

The main purpose of this step is to become acquainted with inside-outside presence, which students will further practice in Steps 2-5. Communicate that it takes considerable practice to attain inside-outside presence. "Inside presence" refers to being aware of your body, your breath and your thoughts. "Outside presence" refers to being aware of your surroundings and other person(s).

- **Attending to the body (5 mins):**

Invite students to direct their attention inwards, i.e. to the body, breath or inner sensations.

- **Attending to surroundings (5 mins):**

Invite students to slowly expand their awareness to things they can notice around them (auditory, sensory, spatial and visual). Eventually, they can also make eye contact. Eye contact in particular seems to draw the attention away from the body and to the environment.

Please note, as part of assessment *as learning*, students reflect using the plenary reflective questions.

Tip: for more detailed instructions of this step, see "Body and surroundings instructions" and "Body and surroundings audio". You can use this audio with the students. Students can use the audio to practice this part more at home.





2. Hand on Leg Exercise 10 - 20 mins

Students are seated and place one hand on their leg. First, instruct them to try focusing on the touch of their hand on their leg. Next, instruct them to try focusing on the touch of their leg against their hand. Then, instruct them to try both at the same time.

Next, instruct students to couple the exercise with an image. The image should work for the individual student and help each individual person in staying aware of hand and leg at the same time. For example, students picture the skin in between their hand and leg, a space in between the two surfaces or a circle going from the hand to the leg, to the hip, to the torso, to the shoulder, to the arm, to the hand, to the leg, etc. Students can also come up with their own image.

Instruct students to make a drawing of the chosen image. Then, invite students to share how the image helps them to focus on their hand touching their leg and their leg touching their hand at the same time.

Tip: for more detailed instructions of this step, see “Hand on leg instructions” and the “Hand on leg audio”. You can use this audio with the students. Students can use the audio to practice this part more at home.



3. Inside-Outside Presence Exercise 10 - 20 mins

Similar to how students tried to focus simultaneously on their hand touching their leg and their leg touching their hand in the previous step, students now focus on their body and their environment at the same time. Students translate the image that they used in Step 2 to this situation, (re-)creating the image that works best for them.

You are advised to communicate that there is not one right way of doing this and that it works differently for everyone.

Instruct students to make a drawing of the chosen image. Then invite students to share how the image helps them to focus on the body and environment at the same time.





4. Practicing Presence in Ordinary Situations 10 – 20 mins

The image created and drawn in Step 3 shifts from being a description to being a tool, similar to a mantra. Students take this image to a daily-life situation and use it to practice inside-outside presence, such as during dinner with friends or a collective work session.

After practising in daily life, students share their experiences in class by answering the plenary reflective questions.

Please note, as part of assessment *as learning*, students reflect using the plenary and the individual reflective questions.



5. Practicing Presence in Challenging Situations 10 – 20 mins

Students now apply the image to practice inside-outside presence in challenging situations or during a specific task that is related to the course. For example, students practice during an interview, a fieldwork situation or while communicating with clients or stakeholders. The exercise can also be done in a classroom situation, in which connecting to each other is particularly important.

Please note, as part of assessment *as learning*, students reflect by repeating the individual reflective questions as in Step 4.





III. Assessment

Assessment encourages students to reflect on their experiences and learning, both individually (in Steps 4 and 5) and collectively (in Steps 1 and 4) .



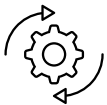
Purpose

Assessment as learning aims to strengthen the learning process and the development of metacognitive skills. It empowers students to direct their own learning and to become independent, critical self-assessors.



Roles

Self-assessment



Characteristics

Self-regulated learning



Materials

Reflective questions





Assessment

Plenary reflective questions (Step 4)

1. In what situation did you practise?
2. Please elaborate on what went well or what was difficult, and why.
3. Were there any moments of particular clarity or insight?
4. Do you need to alter the image in some ways to make it more productive in real life situations? Adjust, if necessary.





Assessment

Reflective questions (Steps 4 and 5)

1. What were you most aware of *before* practising inside-outside-presence?

Inside presence outside presence

2. What were you most aware of *during* practising inside-outside-presence?

Inside presence outside presence

3. What were you most aware of *after* practising inside-outside-presence?

Inside presence outside presence





IV. Key Advice

Body and Surroundings Exercise instructions and audio instructions (Step 1) and **Hand on Leg instructions and audio instructions** (Step 2) can be downloaded below.





Body and Surroundings Exercise Instructions

Part 1

Invite students to focus on their body, through words similar to: “*See if you can bring your attention to your body*”.

After giving students some time to do this, *continue* with:

“And notice what it is that you do when you focus on your body...

What do you feel when you feel your body?

So become aware of what it is that you become aware of when you are given the task to focus on your body.”

The repetitive language with slight reformulations (you can add your own formulations and repeat as much as you seem fit in the situation, depending on how much time students need to shift their attention from what is happening around them to their body), allows students to follow the instruction in their own way and time. It also emphasises that the task is not to become aware of the body in a specific “set” way, but that the task includes becoming aware of *how they* do this.

You can give examples, such as:

“Maybe you become aware of your breath...

Maybe you become aware of your body touching the chair you are sitting on...

Maybe you become aware of the proximity of the body or bodies next to you...

Maybe you become aware of your clothes... maybe the uncomfortable elastic of your left sock... or the soft texture of your sweater... (You are inviting “goods” and “bads” here and also specificities: so “clothes” to the “elastic of the left sock”)

Maybe you become aware of the pain in your shoulder...

Maybe you feel an itch or tingle...

Maybe you feel tired...

Maybe you notice that you are hungry”

Through these examples, you give examples of what feeling the body may entail. This makes it more accessible (yes, feeling tired is also feeling the body). However, these examples can also work in a performative way: now that tiredness is mentioned, students may actually notice that they are tired, even if they did not notice this before. Questioning the “authenticity” of feeling is not the aim here (was the feeling there before the words or enacted through the words?). The aim is to make students attend to their bodies in an accessible way, while also becoming reflective about what ways of feeling their body they are used to and not.

Make sure to acknowledge and communicate that feeling the body does not necessarily come naturally and can be very challenging for a lot of people. Giving these options helps students in this task and sets the tone: there is not one (natural or “good”) way of feeling the body, but how we feel our body depends on our background, context and the situation and conditions of that





moment. You can also mention that some ways of feeling the body may feel unsafe and that students can stick to a way of attending to their body that feels safe to them at that moment.

After giving students some time to notice what they become aware of, invite them to close their eyes or, alternatively, gaze at a point in front of them. The latter is meant for students to whom closing their eyes feels unsafe or unpleasant. Gazing at a point on the floor or desk in front of them, without focusing on anything specific, blurring their view, can have the same effect as closing the eyes. The idea is that students “look inward”: instead of gathering information about their surroundings, they gather information about their body and themselves.

With eyes closed (or gaze blurred), students keep on attending to their body. They stick to one way of doing so: staying with the breath, or the itch, or the tiredness, switching between different ways as little as possible, while noticing a tendency to do so (which is probable). They may also notice how what they focus on changes (maybe the breath becomes slower, maybe the itch disappears, maybe the tiredness increases). The group continues doing this for at least 5 minutes.

Part 2

Invite the students to focus on their surroundings, through words similar to:

“Now, with your eyes closed or your gaze blurry, turn your awareness to your surroundings.

Maybe you hear sounds.

Maybe you smell something.

Maybe you feel the temperature of the room.

Maybe you notice the presence of other bodies in the space.

Try to use all of your senses to notice your surroundings. Even with your eyes closed, maybe there is light coming in through your eye lids. Or maybe you can still imagine the colors in this space.

Try to imagine the distance between you and the wall in front of you.

Try to imagine the distance between you and the wall on your right.

And the wall on your left.

And the ceiling.

Try to notice the distance between you and another body that is near you (this can be another human or a non-human body).

Try to notice the distance between your body and a body that is far away from you.

Go back to hearing sounds. In this space. Maybe you notice sounds outside of this space.

Now go back to a way of attending to your surroundings that was most accessible for you.

Part 3

Similar to part 3 of the hand-on-leg exercise, now invite the students to become aware of both at the same time: their body and their surroundings. After you give the students some time to try this, you can ask:

“Notice what you do when you try to do this. How do you feel both at the same time?”

Some people switch very quickly from one to the other.

Some people focus on the skin, so the boundary between their body and the surroundings. Or they imagine some kind of space in between on which they can focus.





Some people imagine a circle: your environment coming into your body through your nostrils as you are breathing – so you are incorporating your environment – and your body breathing part of itself out into your surroundings: so you are excorporating part of your body to your environment.

Some people imagine that a part of their body becomes one with their surroundings.

There is not one right way of doing this. Notice which imagination works best for you when trying to feel both at the same time. Try to make this image as sharp as possible”

After giving students some time to explore this, make this task slightly more difficult by asking the students to slowly open their eyes.

“While staying with your image for your inside-outside presence, very slowly start opening your eyes.

Notice whether this makes staying with your body and your environment at the same time more difficult. Especially when you start making eye contact with potential others in this space.

Notice what you do when it becomes more difficult: do you turn to your body, or do you turn to your environment?”

Part 4

Discussion: invite an exchange among students about how they solved the problem. What kind of imagination helped them to focus on the body and the surroundings at the same time? Students make notes!

Assignment: Make a drawing that visualises the imagination that helps for practicing this kind of inside-outside presence.

You can refer back to the examples they mentioned during the exercise. Students should get at least 5 minutes to do this.

Discussion: how did you draw your way of practicing simultaneous attentiveness your body and your surroundings?

It may well be that students have not found a way that worked for them yet. Sharing the drawings among students can help inspire them. They can practice this home at home and find a way that works best for them. This exercise can be found as a guided audio exercise, for students to practice individually. You can use this to get a sense of how to lead this exercise or use the audio in class.

Alternatively, for instance in the case of students (or teachers) who do not think in images, the exercise can also be to find a word inside-outside presence (for instance, “circle”, “shifting boundaries” or “shifting swiftly”).





Hand on Leg Exercise Instructions

Part 1

While the students are seated, invite the students to close their eyes (or blur their gaze) and focus on their body again (in any way that is accessible, safe and realistic for them, see Part 1 of “Body and Surroundings Exercise Instructions”). Once students have turned their attention to their bodies, ask them to put one hand on their leg (other body parts can be used alternatively, but this example mentions hands and legs to simplify the explanations). Give students some time to feel the touch between the hand and the leg. Then, ask:

“Notice what dominates in your awareness: your hand touching your leg or your leg touching your hand”.

This may work performatively rather than as an enquiry, as students may become aware that feeling the hand with their leg is also an option. Often, people are used to using some body parts to touch their environment, more than others (for instance, most people tend to explore the texture of an object with their hands, rather than with the upper leg).

Now, invite students to specifically focus on the hand touching the leg. Here, options for what can be felt can help students to feel, for instance:

“Maybe your hand feels the texture of your pants.

Maybe your hand feels the temperature of your leg.

Maybe your hand feels the hardness or softness of your leg.

You can imagine what it is that you are touching when you touch your leg: skin, flesh, muscle, bone?

Maybe your hand feels some kind of movement in your leg.”

You can also invite students to become aware of how they are touching, for instance by saying:

“Notice how you use your hand when you are touching your leg. Are you moving your hand, or does it stay in the same spot? Are you softly touching your leg or are you, for instance, slightly squeezing it?”





Part 2

After you have given the students some time to feel their legs with their hands, invite the students to do the opposite: touching their hands with their legs. Again, you can help the students by giving different options as to how to attend to this touch:

“Maybe your leg feels the weight of your hand.

Maybe your leg feels the pressure of your hand. Is the pressure the same for each part of your hand?

Maybe your leg feels the temperature of your hand.

Is your leg touching your entire hand, or is there space between some parts of your hand and your leg?

Maybe your leg feels movement inside your hand.”

You can also invite students to become aware of how they are touching, for instance by saying:

“Notice how you use your leg in order to touch your hand. Does the leg remain still? Do you have to concentrate hard to use the skin or nerve endings of your leg to touch the hand? Are you using your leg muscles for this?”

Part 3

After some time, ask the students to try to do both at the same time: feeling the hand touching the leg and feeling the leg touching the hand. After you give the students some time to try this, you can ask:

“Notice what you do when you try to do this. How do you feel both at the same time?

Some people switch very quickly from one to the other.

Some people focus on the skin between the hand and the leg. Or they imagine some kind of space in between on which they can focus.

Some people imagine a circle: going from the hand to the leg, to the hip, to the torso, to the shoulder, to the arm, to the hand, to the leg, etc. Or the other way around.

Some people imagine that the hand and the leg become one body part.

There is not one right way of doing this. Notice which imagination works best for you when trying to feel both at the same time. Try to make this imagination as sharp as possible”

After giving students some time to explore this, guide them through opening their eyes again and becoming aware of the space around them.





Part 4

Discussion: invite an exchange among students about how they solved the problem. What kind of imagination helped them to focus on the hand touching the leg and the leg touching the hand at the same time. Students make notes!

Assignment: Make a drawing that visualises the imagination that helps for practicing this kind of inside-outside presence.

You can refer back to the examples they mentioned during the exercise. Students should get at least 5 minutes to do this.

Discussion: how did you draw your way of practicing attentiveness to the hand, the leg and their reciprocal touch?

It may well be that students have not found a way that worked for them yet. Sharing the drawings among students can help inspire them. They can practice this home at home and find a way that works best for them. This exercise can be found as a guided audio exercise, for students to practice individually. Teachers can use this to get a sense of how to lead this exercise or use audio in class.

Alternatively, for instance in the case of students (or teachers) who do not think in images, the exercise can also be to find a word inside-outside presence (for instance, “circle”, “shifting boundaries” or “shifting swiftly”).

