



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”).