

22. Organization of Mind

... to approach each task with a clear head

How often have you felt your head was about to burst with all the information, things to do, and student needs racing through your brain in a never-ending loop?

“You look terrible,” Mr. Ludwick told the other teacher monitoring the hall with him.

“Thanks,” was the mumbled reply. “Can’t sleep.”

“You sick?” Mr. Ludwick asked.

“Na—just too much stuff in my mind. You know how it is.”

“Actually, I don’t,” Mr. Ludwick said. “I sleep like a baby.”

“What’s your secret?” the colleague yawned.

“I just tell myself as I get into bed that I’ll think of all that stuff in the morning. It works for me.”

“And then do you think of it in the morning?”

Mr. Ludwick smiled. “What difference does it make?” he said. “I get a good night’s sleep.”

Ten Ways to Organize Your Mind

1. Do your best to focus on one thing at a time, even if you are multi-tasking. Do this by purposefully forcing away thoughts of anything but the immediate task.
2. Use the “I’ll-think-about-it-later” strategy. When you find many thoughts bombarding your brain, pick one, and tell yourself you’ll think about the others in ten minutes (or half an hour or “later”).
3. Sing. Join a choir or glee club or simply sing along with your car radio or a CD at home. Singing forces the mind to relax and release random thoughts.
4. Make notes diligently. When thoughts pop into your head, jot them down instead of allowing them to clutter your mind.
5. Experiment with pre-sleep techniques for uncluttering the active mind to find one that works for you. (See next page.)
6. If you wake during the night and a cluttered mind prevents you from returning to sleep, get up, have a warm drink (without caffeine), read something “light” for 15–20 minutes, then return to bed.
7. Practise “active listening,” where you focus all your attention on the speaker to internalize and really *hear* what is being said.
8. During the day, practise simple at-your-desk exercises whenever you feel mind clutter bogging you down. (See next page.)
9. Go for a *brisk* walk, even just around the school, and focus on the environment.
10. Take a class in yoga, tai chi, or pilates and attend regularly.

Uncluttering the Mind

Getting Ready to Sleep

- Take a warm bath (not a shower) at the same time nightly.
- When you get into bed, take a series of three to ten deep breaths, holding each for as long as possible and releasing slowly.
- Avoid sugar or caffeine for two to three hours before bedtime.
- Try to go to bed at about the same time every night.
- Invest in a night-time eye mask. When worn, a mask provides a sense of peace and quiet.
- Some people relax with a glass of wine before bed. One glass serves the purpose.
- Try a warm milk drink, preferably not chocolate.
- If you understand yoga, practise a couple of the relaxation stretches before getting into bed. The “seated forward bend” (rag-doll slouch) or the “child’s pose” work well.
- Read a book for pleasure just before retiring.

Relaxing the Body

All of these exercises can be done seated at your desk or even in your car. Often, when the mind is racing, the body is also tense. By reducing the physical tension even a little, the overactive head seems better able to relax. At the very least, the exercises will serve as an effective, temporary distraction.

- To reduce neck tension: On an exhalation, turn your head as far to one side as possible and look down over your shoulder. Hold for a few seconds. Inhale as you return to centre and repeat for other side.
- To reduce leg tension: Extend one leg away from body, foot flexed. On an exhalation, lean as far toward extended leg as possible and hold.
- To reduce anxiety: On an exhalation, slump forward onto your knees, rag-doll fashion, and hold.
- To release tension in back: Reach one arm down to the floor while the other stretches to the ceiling. Hold for twenty seconds.
- To reduce upper back fatigue: Squeeze shoulder blades as close together (behind you) as possible. Hold for five seconds. Pull shoulders as close to each other in the front as possible. Hold for five seconds. Repeat.
- To release back tension: Clasp hands in front, then push arms away from the body while inverting the hands (palms facing away from you). Hold.
- To reduce neck tension and headaches: Gently roll the head in a half circle from one side to the other with chin down to chest in mid-arc. Do not drop the head back.
- To reduce lower back stress: Contract abdominal muscles (pull belly button to backbone and then “down” to tailbone) and hold for as long as possible.
- To reduce anxiety: Close eyes and breathe in deeply (expand stomach, raise diaphragm). Hold for five seconds. Gently exhale through mouth, attempting to remove *all* residual air from lungs. (*Note:* If you cough, that’s good!) Repeat several times. Use imagery to visualize yourself inflating and deflating like a balloon, and blowing out all stress on the exhalations.