Using Mindfulness for Writing-Related Anxiety

Trying to start a new academic paper used to leave me in a cold sweat, panicked and nauseated. When I sat down to start, my mind was distracted by thoughts warring for my attention. I often postponed the work until hours before it was due. Then, in a mad rush, I would write a chaotic paper full of mistakes and a paucity of cohesive thought. I wondered if there was a better way to write school papers that wasn’t racked in throat-throttling stress.

I found a powerful and simple answer this summer. I took an intensive study abroad class on Buddhist Theory in France where I was exposed to mindfulness practice, and learned to write from a place of stillness.

To practice, I would sit still, focus on my breathing, and observe my surroundings without letting my thoughts drift away to things in the past or future. When my thoughts did arise, I labeled them “thinking” and gently let them go like butterflies from my palm, returning my focus to breathing.

Something miraculous happened: after practicing meditation, I felt centered and clear-headed, ready for any task. Meditation cleared the obstructions to my writing: fear, anxiety, and racing thoughts.

Meditation is a game-changer for this anxious writer. If you suffer some of the same anxieties or blocks before you write, I recommend you give it a try. For those who have never tried meditation, try listening to a guided meditation for beginners on YouTube.

College is hard enough. When it’s time to start writing, we owe it to ourselves to take care of, not punish, our mind and well-being.

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