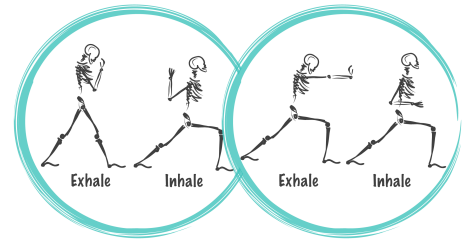


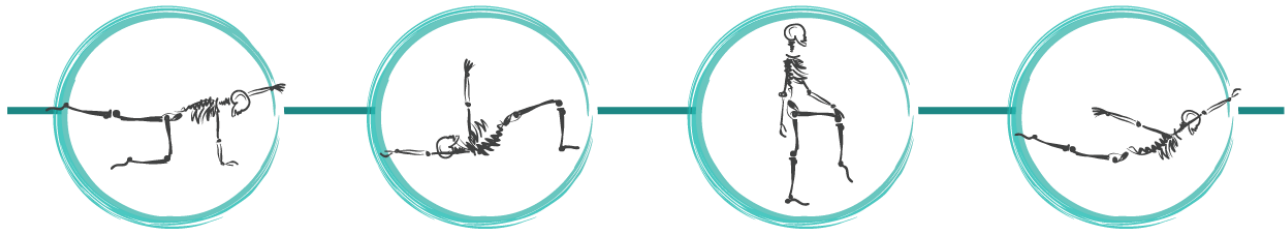
6 TOOLS TO HELP FOCUS THE MIND DURING A YOGA PRACTICE

Ultimately yoga is about mastering the field of attention and the ability to maintain focus for an extended period of time. And teaching yoga is about guiding your students' attention throughout the practice, directing it where you want it to go, picking it up if it drops off. Here are some tools that you can use to help students focus their attention during a yoga practice:

1. Keep the structure of the class consistent but **change the details**. Reorder things, make transitions different, pause in unexpected places. Our brains are wired to be keenly aware of changes, so whenever we detect a deviation from the familiar, we pause to notice. Choosing different pose adaptations works great for that. Direct your students to do something different with their arms in the pose (while making sure that it corresponds with the overall intention of the practice) and your students' minds will be pulled right into their bodies.

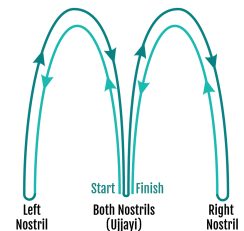


2. **Try right-left brain integration movements** that encourage you to use both sides of your brain and therefore keep you more focused. The examples of movements include cross-lateral movements, crossing the midline of the body movements, mismatched movement and "defying expectations" movement.



3. **Do a balance pose.** This is a simple yet effective way to pull your students into the present moment. Attempting any balance pose will make them pay attention; it doesn't have to be complex or intricate.
4. **Introduce breath adaptation in asana.** For example, you can have students inhale and move into the pose for 6 seconds twice, then for 8 seconds twice and then hold the pose inhaling for 8 seconds and exhaling for 8 seconds. These are called ratios and they work great to deepen the breath, accomplish energetic goals of the practice and to keep students present.

5. **Try an interesting pranayama** that requires students to pay attention. One of the most attention-grabbing pranayamas is *Pratiloma Ujjayi*. It is similar to *Nadi Shodhana*, but requires more attention, that is why it is excellent to use before meditation or just as a focusing device.



6. **Anchor the mind.** During meditation instead of giving wordy instructions or allowing the mind to wander, encourage your students to hook their attention to specific anchor points, like body parts ("feel your fingertips touching the floor"), body sensations ("focus on the sensations in your nose when the air enters it"), or body actions ("gradually contract your abdomen from the pubic bone toward the navel when you exhale"). Those anchor points should be tangible and clearly identifiable for any student (as opposed to something that requires the use of one's imagination, like "feel the energy flow from your belly down into the ground").

And remember: any time you do something new, something unexpected or something relevant, you get your students' attention.