



Experiencing the flow state can be difficult to achieve for many of us. We need an optimal environment, a task or hobby we enjoy primarily for the sake of the activity itself (i.e., we care more about mastering it than performing for others), a minimum amount of skill in that task or hobby, and then something challenging.

Yet, cognitive research has found that it is possible to simulate a similar experience in the short term. For some of us, we may need to practice how to cultivate our flow experiences using these short exercises.

This activity has two parts. The first is a walkthrough of the steps often needed to create flow using a brief game. It may work for you and it may not. The research into flow is clear that some people can experience mini flow states with certain activities, but not everyone. Still, this should illustrate the general approach. The second part then is to guide you in identifying your own flow process.

Part 1: Getting into flow

First, answer the following question using the scale below: on average, how good are you at basic video games?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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Second, prepare a stopwatch using an app on your phone, on your computer, or in an internet browser. It needs to be a stop watch that will track time for you, not a timer with a predetermined time.

Once you have the stopwatch set and ready to start counting up from zero, you will complete the following steps. Make sure to read through them all first before completing them.

1. Start your stopwatch
2. Open this [link](#) and start playing.
3. Keep playing the game until you lose twice. **Immediately** guess how many minutes and seconds you have been playing.
4. Stop the stopwatch.

Once you have completed the four steps above, write your guessed time and actual time below.

Guessed time: _____

Actual time: _____

Answer the following question using the rating scale below: how hard was this particular game for you?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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Reflect on the experience of playing the game. Were you aware of time while playing? How focused did you feel? Were you feeling stressed, bored, relaxed, or having fun?

Compare your times and your two ratings. In past research, people who answer five or higher on the first question and five or higher on the second question tend to underestimate their time. This is believed to be because the challenge of the game and the skill was appropriately matched to create some amount of flow experience. Those that guess MORE time passed than actually did are usually those that are either bored (so the game was not challenging enough) or anxious (those that rate themselves lower on their skill).

Not everyone experiences flow with this challenge. If you did not, that does not mean that you cannot experience flow ever; only that this particular task is not something that is meaningful or properly matched for you. If that is the case, the next part will be particularly helpful for you.

Part 2: Planning for flow

We can find flow in our lives if we practice and optimize our environment to create it. We recommend doing this next part as a journal exercise and to even consider regularly returning to this journal exercise if you find it helpful.

Choose something you love to do. It can be a fun activity or hobby, something with a lot of meaning and value to you (refer to the values module if you need to revisit your values), or even your work.

Select a task. For example, if you play an instrument, it can be learning a particular song or even practicing a particular section of that song. It is important that this task or activity be challenging! It has to be something that is going to require us to use our skills. However, it cannot be too hard. That pushes us to avoidance and stress.

Engage in this task during your peak time. We all have different times that our energy—physical, cognitive, and spiritual—peaks. Capitalize on that. If you are unsure of what that time is for you, experiment and keep track during this journal exercise.

Clear away distractions. Turn off the phone. Connect with others, if they are involved. Practice mindfulness and let yourself be fully immersed in the moment.

Allow yourself to enjoy the moment. By being present-focused, you will naturally be less focused on performance and meeting some sort of expectation. That creates space to have a truly positive experience.

Keep practicing. Find the love of what you do every time and when it isn't there, keep practicing. The act itself will bring about those feelings and then you can reap the rewards of flow.