

Stress Reduction for Teachers and Students

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GREAT NEWS!

Definition of Stress: a set of physical symptoms

STRESS IS : rapid, shallow breathing, rapid heart rate, muscle tension, headaches, sweaty palms or body . . .

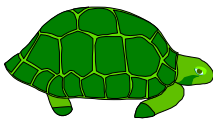
Disruptions of sleep, of sexuality, of appetite –

We may get too little or too much; either way, we feel unsatisfied.

The Good News: Stress is entirely within our control if we choose!

This doesn't mean the circumstances of life are always in our control.
But our physical responses can be!

Stress is good (yes, really!)



Zero Stress = Couch Potato

Optimal Stress is good:

e.g., butterflies, bright ideas at 3:00 a.m., deadline clarity, adrenalin boost when teaching.

The question is not: “**How can I get stress out of my life**” but “**How much stress is good for me?**”

The Cascade that Leads to Stress

Circumstances trigger **thoughts**.

Then thoughts trigger **feelings**.

Then feelings trigger **stress**.

. . . and stress, as we know, is
**a set of physical symptoms
that we can control.**

**We can interrupt this cascade wherever we choose to,
by addressing**

our circumstances, our thoughts, our feelings, or the physical symptoms of stress.

Fortunately, the level that's easiest to notice is also the one we can most easily deal with: the physical symptoms of stress.

No matter what's causing it, there are techniques we can use to reduce stress any time we choose to!

How to Reduce the Physical Symptoms of Stress

- Eat sensibly; drink plenty of fluids
- Exercise: regular, non-stressed, aerobic
- Rest; respect your biorhythms
- Learn and practice relaxation techniques
- Take stretch breaks
- Find three things to smile about every day.
- Don't smoke
- Use alcohol moderately; overdoing may seem to reduce stress at the time, but only adds to it in the long run
- Walk slowly
- Pause between things: take frequent 3-minute "do-nothing" breaks

Three Things You Can Do in Two Minutes or Less

- Breathe in slowly and deeply, release breath all at once, with an explosive "Huhhh..." Do this three times.
- "Breathing in, I relax my body; breathing out, I smile." Repeat several times.
- Two-Minute Vacation: close your eyes, go somewhere wonderful in your mind for 2 minutes. Engage all your senses, one at a time. Come back gently.

Feelings Associated with Stress

pessimism, irritability, frustration, discouragement, overwhelm, fear, guilt
("I should know more. I should do more . . .")

. . . and "Lack of" symptoms: lack of energy, enthusiasm, motivation, creativity, dreams . . .

These feelings often lead to: disorganization, memory problems, lack of assertiveness, difficulty making decisions, unproductiveness, and procrastination . . . and then we feel even worse!

To Handle Feelings:

- 1-Minute Feedback: Students write a note telling you one thing they learned. These are quick to read. You'll feel good about what they learned and you'll get more clarity about what they need in the next lesson.
- Invite observers to tell you one thing they liked and can use in their own classes.
- Just before sleep, re-live something satisfying from your day. Then, when you first wake up imagine something satisfying in the day.
- Keep a Folder of Appreciations. Read it sometimes!

**Don't feel bad because you
sometimes feel bad.**

The Thought-Feeling Connection

Feelings are always sparked by thoughts -- thoughts that may flash through our minds so quickly that we don't even notice them.

These thoughts (reactions to a current situation) tend to provoke one of two feelings:

I'm not good.

I'm not safe.

To Handle Stressful Thoughts

Notice the feeling.
Catch the thought that sparked it.
Think:

Am I truly not good?
(e.g., because today's lesson
didn't do much for Xavier)

Am I really not safe?
(e.g., because I missed a deadline)

Nonsense!

These thoughts are usually relics from the past,
not warranted by what's happening now.

So slowing down and catching our thoughts is a great way to avoid stress.

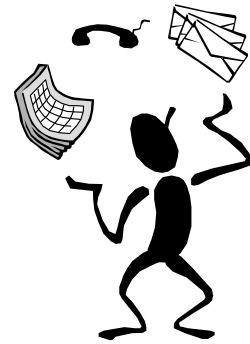
Thoughts Associated with Stress:

- Wanting something but not sure what
- Busy-brain, a.k.a. ‘Popcorn thinking’
We have 60,000 thoughts a day; 95% of these are the same as yesterday’s.
- “I don’t wanna” syndrome: I don’t wanna WORK, I don’t wanna see friends or do chores, and I can’t think of anything fun to do.

• **Remedies for the thoughts that lead to stress:**

- Notice your self-talk. This is the single most important step toward changing it.
- Congratulate yourself before and after sleep.
- Develop a forgiving attitude. Let people do their own thing; you are not the manager of the universe.
- Be assertive. Stand up for your rights and beliefs. Say ‘no’ when you need to. Don’t feel that you always have to live up to others’ expectations.
- Take regular time alone to get perspective.
- Take responsibility for your life – to a point. Control what you can and leave the rest behind.
- Set realistic goals and expectations. It’s healthy to realize you can’t be 100% successful at everything all at once.
- Ask for help.
- When you feel stressed, ask: “Can I enjoy what I’m doing right now?”
The answer will often be “Yes, I can!” This shows you were fretting about the past or the future.
So go ahead and enjoy what you're doing now!

Circumstances That Can Lead to Stress



TOO MUCH TO DO, TOO LITTLE TIME!

Facts about Busy-ness:

- Most people FAR overplan how much they can do in a day.
- Most of us do too much. And when we aren't, we're trying to do too much, then feeling guilty about what didn't get done.
- Definition of procrastination: The normal human response to having too much to do.



Remedy:

Stress and Busy-ness reinforce each other in a vicious circle.

How can we manage stress? People often start by deciding to **reduce their workload**.

Unfortunately, stress soon pushes us back into our old habits of overwork.

But when we **start by reducing stress**, the workload comes down over time because we are becoming more relaxed, more efficient, more able to think clearly.

So don't boss yourself into doing less.

Instead:

**Reduce your physical stress.
The workload will come down.**

Re-Think the To-Do List

When WHAT WE VALUE doesn't match HOW WE SPEND OUR TIME, we get stressed. So . . .

- Without making any changes, **notice** how you spend your time.
 - For a couple of typical days, keep an "Every 15 Minutes" journal to track what you actually do,
 - or take a good look at your 'To-Do' list, then re-organize it.
- Re-organize** your 'To-Do' list with a time management grid.

Covey Time Management Matrix

Write everything from your To-Do list in one of these boxes. Sit back and look at it.

Maybe you'll decide to let the emails go and phone your brother today. And that porch? Hey, life goes on if it never gets swept.

Urgent (have to do it soon) and Important to me (I value this highly) <i>picking up my child from school</i>	<i>Urgent (to someone)</i> but Not Important to me (e.g., somebody else thinks I should do it.) <i>answer emails</i>
Not Urgent But Important to me <i>spending time with my brother</i> <i>flossing my teeth</i>	Not Urgent and Not Important <i>sweeping the porch</i>

Scofield Time Management Matrix

Put your 'to-do' list in three columns. Each day, do some things from each column. You'll feel nourished and have more clarity and energy for the things you need to do.

Mind	Body	Spirit

- Take things off** your 'To-Do' list.
 - Learn to say NO
 - Get help / delegate
 - Be a 'smart' procrastinator; some things go away.
- Add the right things** to your To-Do list: hobbies, fun, play, trying new things.

Too Much to Do?

- Take care of yourself first so you CAN take care of the world.
- About Urgency: CAN'T WAIT! is a sign of stress and a cause of stress.
- It's far better to do a few things well; if you dilute your energy, your students suffer (and your family and friends, too!)

Mantras against overwork:

- Don't work harder!
Try working easier, instead!
- If you're exhausted,
You're Doing It Wrong.
- Less is more: let the STUDENTS do the work.
Remember the 10% presentation, 90% application rule: Our students learn more, (and we learn more about what they know) if we let THEM do the work while we diagnose, facilitate, coach as needed, observe, think . . . and BREATHE.
- And a good mantra against perfectionism:
"I'm going to go right out there and do a _____ job!"
You supply the adjective. ☺

More Tips to De-Stress Teaching

- Write “Plan for Today” on board. Preview this; then at end of class review it.
- Give an example/demonstration every time you give directions.
- Use classroom routines
 - Start and end classes with a set pattern
 - Find good, repeatable activities that don’t need preparation
- **Put students in charge of their own learning** Create good paper-handling systems, e.g., a folder for each class, with compartments for: class list / lesson plans / papers to return / papers collected / announcements / handouts.
- Sort and eliminate papers at the end of each day.
- Plan the next lesson while the last one is still fresh in your mind.
- Use cooperative learning structures. They motivate students, ensure that everyone participates at their own level, and give you time to breathe and think during class.
- Don’t let over-preparation get in the way of planning – find low-preparation activities that work well for you and your students.

Planning: The vision we have of our students’ goals and how to help them get there

Preparation: What a teacher needs to sit down and do to get activity ready for class

Incorporate good Zero Preparation teaching routines into your weekly plan!

Routine

An activity so effective, so flexible,
that we find ourselves using it
again and again,

varying the content and level
but keeping the basic structure
of the activity intact.

“TEACHER, HELP ME!”

What can we do when students look to us for more than we can give?

Help students help themselves:

- Try reflective listening: "It looks like you're feeling urgent about this . . ."
- The student who talks through a problem may relax and find his/her own solutions.
- Project confidence in the student's ability to solve problems: Ask "What can you do about this?" Invite the student to prioritize what to work on.
 - Encourage peer help.
 - Steer the student to other resources for tutoring.
 - Suggest language exchange partners.
 - Give tips about (or find classmate to model) study skills and test-taking skills.
 - Offer the analogy of the tree.

Too Many Papers?

- Create good paper-handling systems, e.g., a folder for each class, with compartments for: class list / lesson plans / papers to return / papers collected / announcements / handouts
 - Sort and eliminate papers at the end of each day.
 - Plan the next lesson while the last one is still fresh in your mind.
 - Correcting a set of papers one by one is NOT the best use of your time!
- When student correct their own work,
1. They learn more because they get to see – right away, not tomorrow -- what they got right, and correct their mistakes right away.
 2. Everyone makes different mistakes, so this offers differentiated instruction.
 3. You don't have to take the papers home.

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Homework Pairs

AIM: Correcting homework assignments (or quizzes and written exercises), learning from classmates, speaking (polite disagreement)

Procedure:

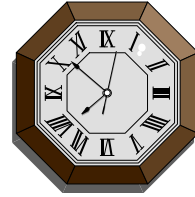
1. In pairs, students compare their answers to a homework assignment. When they disagree on an answer, they try to persuade each other.
2. If they still do not agree, they ask for your help or walk around to learn other pairs' opinions.

Extension: Is there a student who did not do this assignment? S/he can listen in on a pair and offer ideas on the differing answers those two students circle.

Conclusion:

Habits take time to change.

Make **one change at a time** and give yourself time to change. Remember the 3-month rule: “You can change any habit you want to, but it’ll take you three months.”



Choose an ally.

Talk to each other regularly about how you’re reducing stress. Congratulate each other on each small step. Try this:

Split your time in half. Take turns being the speaker and the listener.

When you are listening, avoid three habitual responses that can weaken or distract the speaker:

- Don’t sympathize.
- Don’t tell your own stories.
- Don’t give advice.

Instead, adopt an attitude of complete confidence, admiration, and unconditional approval toward the speaker. **Listening, just listening, with complete admiration and confidence in the speaker is the most effective help you can give.**

When you are speaking, slow down. Notice how you feel. As you talk, pay attention to the thoughts that spark these feelings. Things will take on a different perspective!

Resources:

1. Bell, Jill. Teaching Multilevel Classes in ESL. Dominie Press, 1991 ISBN 56270-032-4
2. Boorstein, Sylvia.
Pay Attention, For Goodness’ Sake!
3. Bassano, Sharron and Mary Ann Cristison. Community Spirit: A practical guide to collaborative language learning. Alta Book Center Publishers. ISBN 1-882483-30-8
4. Hess, Natalie. (2001). Teaching Large Multilevel Classes. New York: Cambridge University Press. ISBN0-521-66785-2
5. Morgenstern, Julie. Organizing from the Inside Out and Time Management from the Inside Out
6. Pollard, Laurel, and Natalie Hess. Zero Prep: Ready-to-go-Activities for the Language Classroom and Zero Prep for Beginners. Alta Book Center Publishers. 1 800-ALTA ESL or altaesl@aol.com
7. Tran, Thich Nat. Peace is Every Step