

Self-Hypnosis and Learning: Getting Started

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Self-hypnosis is a skilled that, once mastered, can help individuals achieve personally meaningful goals. This handout offers an introduction to self-hypnosis.

Self-hypnosis is...

- ✓ A skill, requiring practice
- ✓ An intentional process of working to achieve a desired result (e.g., relaxation, pain relief, improved concentration)
- ✓ A state of alert wakefulness not sleepiness
- ✓ A method of suppressing conscious criticism and allowing suggestions to go right to the unconscious mind

Self-hypnosis is not...

- ✓ Giving up control. You actually have more control over usually untapped internal resources.
- ✓ A way to make you do something against your will. You always understand what is right for you; and you control the suggestions used in the process.

Determining Goals for Self-Hypnosis

1. Make a list of your goals for change or improvement (e.g., to improve concentration when studying; to improve exam performance).
2. Make a list of what might hold you back from making these changes (e.g., the fear of missing out on some social activity if you commit to concentrated study time; reluctance to be held to a high standard in terms of grades). Consider making these barriers into their own goals (e.g., getting involved in fulfilling social activities; feeling confident about academic success).
3. Identify all the steps involved in the goal (breaking into manageable pieces that are stated in positive, affirmative words). For instance, if the goal is to do well in your English class this semester, the steps might be:
 - a. Perform well on exams (achieve As or Bs)
 - b. Study effectively
 - c. Be able to concentrate and comprehend homework
 - d. Pay attention during lectures
4. Develop several visual images for each goal (e.g., the concentrated focus of an eagle, soaring to great academic heights; the effortless but focused wind breezing through exams). Use your imagination!

PREPARING FOR SELF-HYPNOSIS

1. Select a place to practice that is personal, safe, quiet, and as free of interruptions as possible
2. Set aside time to practice—at first, 15-20 minutes then 8-10 minutes or 3-4 minutes several times a day.
3. Expect results; suspend judgment and allow yourself to get the most of out this.
4. Develop a short, focused suggestion to begin the session (e.g., “Breathe and let go,” or “Relaxed and confident.”)
5. Select a position—sitting in a chair that supports your head and allows you to sit upright; relax your body.
6. Design a “post-hypnotic suggestion” (a statement of what you want to achieve). Make this very specific (e.g., “When I sit down to study Calculus, I will feel focused and confident, like an eagle soaring to great heights. There may be many distractions, but I will be able to soar above those distracting noises, voices, and sights. Even though they are still present, they will not interfere with my focus on my goals, and I will be able to give full attention to my study material.)
7. Design a “post-hypnotic cue”--something specific within your control that will signal the start of the desired behavior. (e.g., opening your Calculus book)
8. Visualize the Desired Result of Self-Hypnosis. Use images from your past that you associate with your desired action (e.g., Picture a time when you did feel relaxed and confident and performed well at a learning task. Where were you? What feelings, sights, sounds were associated with that time?)
 - a. “Process” imagery: imagine the process of studying effectively (e.g., Imagine yourself engrossed in doing your Physics homework—reading and comprehending the material, designing your own ways to test Physics concepts, etc.)
 - b. “Results” imagery: imagine what the outcome will be like (e.g., Imagine feeling confident, knowledgeable, and successful in explaining the theory of relativity to someone.)

INDUCING A TRANCE

Start by Breathing Deeply

1. Inhale to count of 3 through your nose; breathe deeply from the abdomen (not the chest and shoulders).
2. Hold breath for count of 3.
3. Exhale through the mouth to count of 6 and say to yourself, "Let go."
4. Wait for count of 4.
5. Begin again, and repeat 4 or 5 times.

Next, Fix Your Gaze and Close Eyes

1. Fix your eyes on some small object as you breathe and relax.
2. Your vision may become somewhat blurred or distorted, and your eyes may burn and feel heavy.
3. When your eyes become heavy and/or tired, close them gently and enjoy this feeling of relief and relaxation.

Then, Focus on Sensations of Relaxation in the Rest of Your Body

1. Scan your body, head to feet, and picture your muscles getting heavy and relaxed.
2. Let tension fade. Notice sensations of warmth, numbness, heaviness, lightness, or coolness in different parts of your body.
3. Use imagery (visualization) to expand feelings of relaxation (e.g., Picture a warm, spring rain washing away tension and replacing with cleansing relaxation; Imagine taking an escalator ride, as you count, down to a peaceful, relaxing room).

Next, Integrate Your Post-Hypnotic Suggestions into Your Images of Relaxation

1. Give yourself positive messages, using the themes you developed as your post-hypnotic suggestions, as you continue to become more and more relaxed and calm.
2. Spend a couple minutes reflecting on the images, thoughts, and suggestions in great (but not forced or pressured) detail. Tell yourself that you will achieve your goals outside this trance whenever you choose to use your post-hypnotic cue. (E.g., "When I am ready to begin studying, I can feel relaxed and confident by taking a few deep, relaxing breaths. When I open my Calculus book, I will be able to focus on my studying and comprehend the material.")

Allow Time to Come Out of Your Trance

1. Consciously guide yourself back out of your trance slowly by saying to yourself, "As I count back from 10, I will feel more and more alert, rested, and return to focusing on my surroundings."
2. Remind yourself that you can come back to this relaxed and focused state any time you want, by inducing a brief trance.