

**Work & Career**

Exercise



10 min



Client



No



## Your Personal Flow Profile

Also known as 'being in the zone,' flow describes a mental state in which a person's abilities match an activity, and their attention becomes so focused on what they are doing that distractions diminish and fade away [1]. In short, those who experience flow, are fully immersed and engaged in an intrinsically rewarding experience, to the point where they feel a deep sense of enjoyment as action and awareness merge [1,2].

Flow state is characterized by complete focus, a strong sense of control, distortion of time perception [2], loss of hubris, and a sense of effortless control [3]. According to research, flow contributes to thriving and optimal living, positively affects overall well-being [1], inspires positive human development and personal growth [2], and increases creativity and productivity [4].

While the route to flow is highly personal, in general, flow-conducive activities balance challenges and skills, have clear goals, and have immediate and unambiguous feedback [1,2]. While some individuals can enter a flow state easily, others have no idea what they need to experience flow [2]. One technique to help people understand the unique factors that contribute to their experience of flow is to create a flow profile.

A flow profile is generated through self-reflection and can help people understand how they experience flow and detect other flow-inducing activities [3,5]. This exercise will help clients develop a unique and personal flow profile through a series of self-reflection questions. Individually, completed flow profiles can be used to increase flow-promoting situations. In group settings, flow profiles can be a valuable and highly personal way to encourage team building and bonding.

### Author

This tool was created by Elaine Houston.



### Goal

This exercise aims to help clients create a unique and personal flow profile. Through self-reflection questions, clients will gain a deeper understanding of how they experience flow and detect other flow-inducing activities in everyday life.



## Advice

- Clients should understand that flow state varies from person to person. Clients must be open to self-reflection to understand what conditions and circumstances lead them into a state of flow and experience flow more consistently.
- This exercise benefits individual clients and groups since it can be used as a team-building/icebreaker exercise. Individually, completed flow profiles can be used to increase flow-promoting situations. In group settings, flow profiles can be a valuable and highly personal way to encourage authentic team-building and bonding. Individual clients can complete steps 1-4 (and the reflection questions in step 6), while the questions in step 5 can be used as a team-building exercise to help small groups get to know each other.
- Many factors can affect the flow state, and the circumstances/activities that facilitate flow can change over time. With this in mind, clients should be prepared to adjust their flow profile in the future as their preferences and circumstances change.



## References

1. Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience*. Harper and Row.
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3. Burt, I., & Gonzalez, T. (2021). Flow state as an existential tool to increase optimal experience and life enjoyment. *The Journal of Humanistic Counseling*, 60, 197-214.
4. Kotler, S. (2015). *The rise of superman: Decoding the science of ultimate human performance*. Quercus.
5. Riva, E., Rainisio, N., & Boffi, M. (2014). Positive change in clinical settings: Flow experience in psychodynamic therapies. In *Enabling positive change: Flow and complexity in daily experience* (pp. 74-90). De Gruyter Open.

## Your Personal Flow Profile

The flow state, known as 'being in the zone,' refers to a person fully focused and absorbed in what he/she is doing, often losing track of time in the process. Individuals who experience flow are so absorbed in an activity that it becomes effortless, fatigue and boredom fade away, and self-conscious thoughts about themselves and their performance are silenced.

While some people experience flow alone in peaceful, serene settings, others might find the flow in fast-paced, stimulating environments. Flow can also be experienced in various activities, including sports, playing a musical instrument, hobbies, sports, and even work.

Experiencing flow is beneficial for both personal and professional performance. For example, flow can decrease stress, improve well-being, and create deep enjoyment and satisfaction. Flow can also enhance performance, creativity, originality, and motivation, so the task becomes the reward.

Many people are unaware of the unique conditions and preferences that lead them to a flow state. One way to clarify this is to create a flow profile. A flow profile is a personalized map of what helps you achieve a flow state. In this exercise, you will create a personal flow profile to help you understand the specific conditions in which you typically experience flow. With these insights, you can recognize other situations and activities with similar characteristics and increase the likelihood of experiencing flow in everyday life.

### Step 1: Understanding the flow state

Before you create your flow profile, you must understand what flow looks like and how it feels. A deeper understanding of flow characteristics will help you recognize instances when you have experienced them in the past.

When you experience flow:

- You have clear goals and know exactly what you are doing
- You have complete focus
- Time speeds up or slows down
- You experience a deep sense of enjoyment and fulfillment
- You feel a sense of effortlessness and ease
- Distractions and self-conscious thoughts disappear
- You feel a sense of control over what you are doing

Examples of people experiencing flow:

- An administrative assistant is tasked with organizing and filing a lot of paperwork. He/she knows what is expected of him/her and gives the task full attention. The assistant enjoys the challenge of such a complex task, becomes completely absorbed, and loses track of time. They feel a deep enjoyment, satisfaction, and fulfillment as they continue to work.



- A florist enjoys the challenge of creating bespoke and creative floral installations. Moving from one step to the next with ease and confidence, they become completely absorbed in what they are doing, and time seems to speed up, and without realizing it, hours have passed.

Finally, here are some quotes from people about their flow experiences.

- *"My mind isn't wandering. I am not thinking of something else. I am involved in what I am doing."*
- *"I don't seem to hear anything. The world seems to be cut off from me. I am less aware of myself and my problems."*
- *"My concentration is like breathing; I never think of it. When I start, I shut out the world and am oblivious to my surroundings."*

## Step 2: Identify your optimal flow conditions

Many unique and personal conditions influence your ability to enter a flow state, from your surroundings to the time of day.

Below, you will find some self-reflection questions related to the various conditions in which you might experience flow. Take some time to consider these questions and write your responses in the Flow Profile template (Appendix A).

### 1. Social Environment

In which social environments do you most often experience the flow?

Examples include:

- Alone, someplace quiet and reflective
- In a crowd
- With a group of friends

Write your responses in the Flow Profile template under *"Social Environment."*

### 2. Feelings

How do you feel when you are in a flow state?

Examples include:

- Excited
- Calm
- Peaceful
- Happy
- Focused
- Energized

Write your responses in the Flow Profile template under *"Feelings."*



### 3. Time

When do you most often find yourself in flow?

Examples include:

- Early in the morning
- In the afternoon
- In the evening or late at night
- At any time of the day

Write your responses in the Flow Profile template under “Time.”

### 4. Facilitators

What helps you to get into flow?

Examples include:

- Experiencing pressure
- Approaching deadlines
- Opportunities to be creative
- Trying to solve a problem
- Having an empty schedule

Write your responses in the Flow Profile template under “Facilitators.”

## Step 3: Identify why you value flow

In this step, you will think about *why* you value flow. In other words, what are the most important benefits of experiencing flow?

So, why do you value flow?

Examples include:

- Helps me to solve challenges creatively
- Lets me feel like I’m at one with everything that’s happening
- Fuels my highest achievements
- Helps me thrive in high-stress environments

Write your responses in the Flow Profile template under “I value flow because...”

#### Step 4: Identify your flow activities

In this step, consider the activities that help you enter a flow state. In general, a flow-promoting activity 1) is challenging but not frustrating, 2) has a clear goal, 3) provides immediate feedback (like positive feelings), 4) matches your skills, and 5) is enjoyable.

Below is a list of activities that typically facilitate flow. Take a moment to consider this list. When ready, write your flow-inducing activities in the space labeled 'Flow Activities' on the Flow Profile template.

This list is not exhaustive, and you can include any additional flow activities not mentioned here in the same space in the Flow Profile template.

#### Common Flow Activities

- |                      |                    |
|----------------------|--------------------|
| ■ Painting           | ■ Crochet          |
| ■ Writing            | ■ Doing puzzles    |
| ■ Playing music      | ■ Coding           |
| ■ Team sports        | ■ Knitting         |
| ■ Listening to music | ■ Programming      |
| ■ Reading            | ■ Adventure sports |
| ■ Dancing            | ■ Cooking          |
| ■ Embroidery         | ■ Yoga             |
| ■ Drawing            | ■ Gardening        |
| ■ Physical exercise  | ■ Woodworking      |
| ■ Video games        | ■ Hiking           |
| ■ Photography        | ■ Baking           |
| ■ Scrapbooking       | ■ Creating music   |

#### Step 5: Group flow profiles (optional step)

The information in your Flow Profile is an authentic representation of you and how you experience flow, and the insights it provides can help you know your team better.

Below are some reflection questions. In small groups of 3-4, you will use your completed flow profiles to discuss these questions.

Looking at your completed flow profiles:

- What similarities can you see between your group profiles?
- How might these similarities help you work better together?
- What differences can you see between your profiles?



- What do you find interesting or noteworthy about these differences?
- What does the flow add to your life?
- What three words would you use to describe your experience of the flow?

#### Step 6: General reflection

- In what ways did you find this exercise helpful?
- What did you learn from this exercise?
- After completing this exercise, what insights have you gained about your optimal flow conditions?
- How will you use these insights in the future?



## Appendix A: Flow Profile Template

My Flow Profile	
<b>Social Environment:</b> I experience flow the most often when...	
<b>Feelings:</b> When I am in a flow state, I feel...	
<b>Time:</b> I most often find myself in the flow...	
<b>Facilitators:</b> What helps me to get into the flow is...	
<b>My flow activities are:</b>	
<b>I value flow because:</b>	



**Appendix B: Completed Example of Flow Profile**

My Flow Profile	
<b>Social Environment:</b> I experience flow the most often when...	I am alone with my thoughts. This is usually someplace calm, quiet, and reflective where I have no distractions.
<b>Feelings:</b> When I am in a flow state, I feel...	Energized, focused, and creative. I could keep doing what I'm doing forever.
<b>Time:</b> I most often find myself in the flow...	In the early morning, before I get bogged down with day-to-day distractions.
<b>Facilitators:</b> What helps me to get into the flow is...	Being faced with a challenge or problem that I haven't encountered before. I find it helps when I have an empty schedule and focus all my attention on finding a solution.
<b>My flow activities are:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Painting</li><li>■ Writing</li><li>■ Reading</li><li>■ Embroidery</li><li>■ Drawing</li><li>■ Photography</li></ul>
<b>I value flow because:</b>	I feel at one with everything that's happening, which helps me feel confident, competent, and happy.