

Nurturing Awareness into Originality: A Mindfulness Framework for Writers

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Abstract: This paper lays out a mindfulness framework that helps writers tap into deep present-moment awareness and turn it into real literary originality. These days, with information coming at us nonstop and algorithms cranking out content, writers deal with creative burnout, imposter syndrome, and the old struggle of sounding like everyone else. Most writing workshops obsess over craft and technical stuff, but this framework goes deeper—it gets into the mental and psychological stuff writers need for real innovation. The approach mixes secular mindfulness practices—like observing without judging, radically accepting what’s there, and open monitoring meditation—with solid theories about creative flow. It leads writers through three clear stages: calming the mind, paying close attention to raw sensations, and then channeling that inner quiet into authentic work. The paper shows how regular mindfulness shuts down the inner critic, helping writers skip the usual shallow scripts and dig out more unique, personal voices and structures. Mindfulness, here, isn’t just about chilling out or feeling better. It’s pitched as this powerful engine for creative endurance. The framework gives teachers and writers a practical way to build lasting artistic voices—starting from real, focused awareness.

Keywords: Nurturing, Awareness, Originality, Mindfulness, syndrome

Introduction

At the onset of this article, I would like to invite you to allow yourself some space — sit or lie down or even stand, if you feel like — allow yourself some space that makes you feel comfortable.

Take a few moments to settle down in the space you are in now. You may do this by taking in three deep breaths.

Breathe in through your nose- gentle and deep. And then slowly breathe out through your mouth. Repeat this cycle once more.

And then, one last time. You may now bring your breath to normal and take a moment to notice your posture. For example, if you are sat on a chair, just notice how your feet touch the floor, how the weight of your body presses down on the chair. If you are lying down, just notice the various contact points of your body with the bed, the floor or the couch. Allow a

gentle gaze on the screen or the page you are reading this article.

I would now like to invite you to notice the various sounds flowing into your ears. Just notice them, as they come and go. Do this for a while. May be for fifteen or twenty seconds.

Now, take a moment to notice your breath. Just the normal cycle of breathing. Notice how the breath is — is it a long one or a short one? Is it a deep or shallow. Notice where the breathing is taking place. Is it on the nostrils? Is it at the chest region? Or the stomach? Notice how your body expands as you breathe in and how it softens as you breathe out.

At this point, it is natural for your mind to wander or get curious about what this writing is all about. It is natural for many different thoughts and feelings to come and go. Befriend them. Let them come and go. Just recognise them as they appear and return to noticing the breath. Do this for a while. May be for a minute or so. I leave a little more space than usual below, so that you can come back to this page after a minute.

I would now like to let go of the focus on the breath and allow your awareness to your surroundings. What sounds do you hear? What things do you see? How does your body feel at this moment?

Take a pause.

And now that you have settled down into your body, mind and emotions, take a moment to read the lines below gently. Slowly. Word for word. Be with the text. Read aloud, if you wish to:

*Have you seen the sea?
Have you never seen it? I haven't either—
yet I have heard
that far away, to the rim of the
horizon, its blue, unbroken mass
of waters surge in wave after
wave.
My heart too is the sea's deep blue,
its sorrow—
have you not seen it?
What do you notice?*

Let's start with the body: how does your body feel? Any sensation, any tingling, anywhere? Pause for a few seconds before you read the next line.

And now, try to notice the emotions emerging in this moment. Once again, pause for a few seconds before you read the next line.

Finally, notice the thoughts appearing in this moment. Once again, pause for a few seconds before you read the next line.

It is also fine not to notice anything. Let's move on.

What would you like to *do* now? Would you like to pursue this article further? Or read something else? Or perhaps do something completely different?

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If you are reading this line, you might have chosen to continue with this article. May be out of sheer curiosity. Perhaps to find out — where is it heading to? What *point* is the author driving at?

What I have just tried to illustrate in Section 1, is a short mindfulness-based exercise on reading. The point I want to make is if we bring our complete awareness — physical, emotional and intellectual — to a text, we can make unique connections in our consciousness and thereby draw insights which we may, in general, not have access to. Many of you may already be aware of this and may be practising this in your reading and writing regimes consciously or unconsciously. The idea is that we savour every bit of the text in consideration — while we read, while we write — just as we sometimes do, when we eat our favourite food.

The excerpt I have shared above is a translation of the Assamese poem — সাগৰ দেখিছা? (*Xaagor Dekhisa?*) by Devakanta Baruah. A general reading of this poem may give us a hint of its themes — love, loss and recompense. And then, if we go through the tens and thousands of critical analyses, research papers and academic journals on this poem or the works of Devakanta Baruah, we may be able to develop an understanding of the depth of the lines, mostly influenced by those writings, and yet we may not be able to create our own unique connection with this literary marvel. Giving it a mindfulness-based reading, on the other hand, will help us in this regard.

Now, you may ask: how can I be so sure? How is mindfulness-based reading different from the way we read? And more importantly, how is it going to help us in our own creativity — writing in particular?

To answer these questions and a few more that may emerge as we proceed with this journey, let me start with what mindfulness is. To be specific, with some sort of a research-based definition of the term.

Jon Kabat-Zinn, an American professor emeritus of medicine and the creator of the Stress Reduction Clinic and the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, defines mindfulness as:

“the awareness that arises from paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgementally.”

Three things stand out in this definition:

- i. *On purpose (intentionality)*: a deliberate, conscious channelling of attention, and not merely “zoning out”, that is becoming oblivious to the surroundings in order to relax.
- ii. *Present moment*: focusing on the “NOW” rather than dwelling on the past.
- iii. *Non-judgementally*: observing experiences, thoughts, emotions and sensations without labelling them as “good” or “bad”.

Kabat-Zinn often highlights that mindfulness is not a technique, but a *way of being* that cultivates deeper connections with life as it unfolds.

Is *mindfulness* something new?

The straight answer is “no”. The core of mindfulness-based practices — present moment awareness, non-judgmental observation and cultivated attention — can be traced back to the Upanishads and the Zen-Buddhist scriptures. However, with the growing interest in neuroscience in every domain of knowledge, creativity and innovation, the research on this subject has increased exponentially over the last few decades. In the VUCA (V=Volatile, U=Uncertain, C= Complex, A= Ambiguous) world we live in, it is even more pertinent, not just for well-being, but also for thriving in our creative and innovative pursuits. The good news is that the modern approach weaves in the deepest tenets of the ancient scriptures and the latest discoveries about the human brain, and thereby, offer secular and practical tools that suit our fast-paced lifestyle. Research papers, knowledge articles and courses abound on the internet on this topic. If your curiosity is piqued by this brief introduction, you may very well, search for Mindfulness in *Google*. I am sure, you won’t be disappointed.

One important point to note here some people may develop mindfulness as a habit quite naturally and often unawares, while some others may need to cultivate it through deliberate practices. Also, some people may be mindful at some activities, while they may find it difficult to be mindful at other activities. Whatever the case may be, it is worthwhile to embed mindfulness as a practice into all our creative pursuits.

I’ll explain why.

Dr David Rock, Founder of Neuro Leadership Institute and author of *Your Brain at Work*, observes the following key facts about the human brain:

- i. The brain is a connection machine. It “creates millions of new connections each second. Novel connections generate neurotransmitters like adrenaline and dopamine, creating energy and a desire to take action. When we are unable to make a connection — when we can’t think of a way out of a problem — we hit an impasse”.
- ii. Up close, no two brains are alike. “Everyone has their unique set of connections for how they think about things.” Basic physical or mental functions, like moving a hand, use similar circuits, but for thoughts about more subtle functions, like creativity, motivation, goals, etc, your pathways are completely different from those of mine.

- iii. The brain hardwires everything it can. The brain treats working memory as a scarce resource, so whatever we repeat gets automated to save energy. These automatised patterns become habits — fast, unconscious, and efficient. Hardwiring drives automatic perception. We do not see the world as it is. We see it through circuits already laid down by past experience. Old neural patterns beliefs, attitudes, emotional imprints — filter incoming reality. Perception, therefore, is less about fresh data and more about pre-existing wiring.
- iv. It's practically impossible to deconstruct our wiring. Attention strengthens whatever it rests on. Hebb's Law reminds us that circuits grow through activation. So, when we keep analysing problems, we often deepen the very patterns we want to dissolve. Change happens more effectively when attention shifts toward solutions, because focus itself is a sculptor of the brain.
- v. It's easy to create new wiring. The brain is continuously mapping new experiences. Every new learning, encounter, or insight lays down fresh circuitry. What makes these circuits durable is not effort alone but the quality and duration of attention. Where sustained focus goes, long-term wiring follows.

Since in our VUCA world, distraction blocks connection, conformity suppresses uniqueness, habit replaces imagination, conditioning distorts perception and scattered attention prevents neuroplastic change, mindfulness is not a wellness add-on. It is the neurocognitive infrastructure for creativity — because it trains the only faculty through which new wiring becomes possible: attention, intentionally placed in the present, without judgment.

Mindfulness enables us to unlock originality by suspending comparison. As Wordsworth puts it, in *Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey*:

*With an eye made quiet by the
power Of harmony, and the deep
power of joy, We see into the life
of things.*

Original perception, or insight becomes possible only when the judging, restless mind grows quiet. This *eye made quiet* is pure non-judgmental awareness — the ground of authentic, non-derivative creativity.

Homen Borgohain, in his essay, *Nijor Prashna Nijor Uttor* echoes a similar vein of thought:

“মানুহে নিজকে নীৰৱতাৰ মাজত নেপালে কেতিয়াও নিজকে চিনি নাপায়।”

(*A person who does not meet oneself in silence never truly knows oneself.*)

Silence here is not withdrawal but the cognitive space in which new understanding — and therefore new connections — becomes possible.

Creativity begins when the noisy, ego-driven mind becomes quiet enough for something new to form. It is the noisy, ego-driven mind which bars us from looking out at the world and within ourselves and hence, as T.S. Eliot says in his illustrious essay, *Tradition and Individual Talent* that “the progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality.”

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What may happen when we embed Mindfulness in our creative pursuits?

While the impact of mindfulness practices varies from person to person, certain patterns repeatedly surface in the lives of great writers:

- i. They help create a toward state for the creator — a renewed, self-propelled movement towards the work even in the most adverse circumstances. J. K. Rowling, writing *Harry Potter* as an unemployed single mother on welfare, kept returning to the manuscript not because the world encouraged her but because the act of attentive immersion itself generated energy and direction. Similarly, after the devastating loss of her husband, Indira (Mamoni Raisom) Goswami found in the disciplined, almost meditative return to writing the only force that moved her towards life and eventually towards *The Moth-Eaten Howdah of the Tusker*. In both cases, mindful engagement with the present act of writing transformed paralysis into momentum.
- ii. They help the creator metabolise rejection and criticism, accept them as part of the journey, and come back with greater vitality. Stephen King could throw *Carrie* into the dustbin after repeated rejection and yet return to the desk the next day because his relationship was with the practice, not the outcome. Arupa Patangia Kalita’s persistent exploration of conflict, violence, and women’s interiority — despite discomfort, resistance, and the weight of public response shows the same non-judgmental acceptance of reality as creative ground rather than creative obstacle.
- iii. They help break the monotony of clichés and open up radically fresh perception. Virginia Woolf’s attentive awareness of inner time, fleeting sensation, and the texture of ordinary moments dissolved the inherited structure of the Victorian novel and made possible the form of *Mrs Dalloway*. In a different yet deeply resonant way, Nilmani Phookan’s sustained contemplative gaze upon image, colour, and landscape allows the most familiar elements of nature — river, field, sky — to appear as if seen for the first time. In both, originality is born not from effort to be new, but from learning to see without the burden of habit.
- iv. They help the creator hold success with restraint and return to the practice instead of the persona. After the Nobel Prize, Rabindranath Tagore did not become a monument to his own fame. He went back to the daily disciplines of writing,

teaching, composing, and later painting, as if each day were still a beginning. Bhupen Hazarika, despite unprecedented popular adulation across the Northeast and beyond, continued to travel, listen, and write from within the lived experience of his people. In both lives, mindful rootedness prevented success from becoming creative stagnation.

- v. They help develop regular, embodied practices that gradually usher the creator into the state of flow. According to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's *Flow Theory*, when attention is fully absorbed in a challenging yet meaningful task, when the sense of time recedes and the self becomes transparent to the work, we enter into a flow. Haruki Murakami's unwavering daily rhythm — fixed hours of writing followed by long-distance running — is less a schedule and more an attentional training through which entering flow becomes natural. Similarly, Homen Borgohain's lifelong discipline of reflective prose, written through sustained and patient engagement with self and society, shows how regularity of mindful practice deepens clarity, and how clarity repeatedly opens the door to those stretches of writing where the work seems to write itself.

Mindfulness does not merely make us calmer creators, it slowly reorganises our creative ecology — failure becomes fuel, repetition becomes depth, success becomes light to carry, and the act of returning to the work becomes the primary source of joy and energy.

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Now that you know why it is important to weave in Mindfulness into your pursuit of writing, what might help you?

Here are ten practices I have picked up from my mentor, Natalie Goldberg. Each one is practical, repeatable, and designed to train attention rather than chase inspiration.

- i. Keep the hand moving every single day: Set a timer for 10 minutes and write without stopping. Don't edit, don't reread, don't cross out. If you get stuck, write "I don't know what to say" until the next line comes. This builds momentum, bypasses the inner critic, and teaches the brain that writing is a safe, doable act.
- ii. Give yourself permission to write badly: Begin by consciously lowering the bar: "This is allowed to be terrible." The moment perfectionism drops, energy returns. You move from avoidance to action. One honest, messy paragraph is neurologically more powerful than an unwritten ideal page.
- iii. Work with practice, not performance: Do timed "writing practices" instead of always working on your main project. Use simple prompts: "a memory of rain," "a broken cup," "a railway platform." This keeps the creative channel open even on difficult days and prepares you to enter flow when you return to your larger work.
- iv. Return to the page within 24 hours of rejection or criticism: Pause. Name the feeling without analysis: "hurt is here," "anger is here." Then write one fresh paragraph — not a correction, a continuation. This trains non-judgmental awareness and prevents your identity from getting fused with the outcome.
- v. Compost your daily life into writing material: Take something that disturbed or moved

- you today and write it in concrete sensory detail — what you saw, heard, smelled, touched. No philosophy, no explanation. Experience becomes material instead of mental noise.
- vi. Practice radical specificity: Whenever you write a general word like “beautiful,” “very,” “nice,” or “things,” replace it with an image or sensory detail. Not “a tree,” but “the neem tree behind the broken wall.” Specificity anchors attention in the present moment and dissolves cliché.
 - vii. Do the one-image meditation: Choose one ordinary object and observe it for five minutes as if you have never seen it before. Then write only what is actually there. This retrains perception and is one of the fastest ways to develop an original voice.
 - viii. Create a fixed entry ritual for writing: Same time, same place, same small beginning — a cup of tea, three conscious breaths, a short walk, then the notebook. Protect the rhythm, not the mood. When the body learns the pattern, the mind follows, and flow becomes more accessible.
 - ix. Write through resistance by naming it on the page: The moment you feel stuck, begin the next sentence with: “I don’t want to write this because...” Continue from there. Resistance loses its power when it becomes content. Movement replaces blockage.
 - x. Stop before you are exhausted and leave a doorway for tomorrow: End the session while you still have something to say. Write down the next line or the next image you will begin with the following day. Your subconscious keeps working on it, and returning becomes effortless.

Core operating principle:

- i. Show up.
- ii. Keep the hand moving.
- iii. Stay specific.
- iv. Use your life as material.
- v. Return the next day.

When repeated, these are not just writing habits — they are attentional training. Creativity stops depending on mood and becomes a reliable, embodied state.

If you are interested to know more about mindfulness-based writing practices, read Natalie’s book, *Writing Down the Bones*.

One more thing — perhaps the most important: read. Read other authors voraciously. Nothing helps create more unique connections in the brain of an author than reading. This is, I believe, an advice, every tenured author would give you. My own practice of reading got a real boost by watching a video of Javed Akhtar Sahab. Here’s the link: <https://youtu.be/YHZE2vnW-G0?si=Ke8m8qe1ppyH38qf>

We now return to the opening practice — this time with clear, step-by-step guidance and a small twist.

Step 1: First, allow yourself some space. You may sit, lie down, or even stand — whatever feels most comfortable and supportive for you right now. Let this be a deliberate choice. Give yourself permission to arrive here.

Step 2: Take a few moments to settle into the space you are in. We will do this with three slow, deep breaths.

- Breathe in through your nose — gentle and deep — and slowly breathe out through your mouth.
- Once more, breathing in... and slowly breathing out.
- And for the last time, breathing in... and letting go.
- Now allow the breath to return to its natural rhythm.

Step 3: Bring your attention to your posture. If you are sitting, notice how your feet touch the floor, how the weight of your body rests on the chair. If you are lying down, notice the points of contact between your body and the surface beneath you. If you are standing, feel the balance of your body. Let your gaze be soft — resting on the screen or the page.

Step 4: Now, begin to notice the sounds around you. There is nothing to search for — just allow sounds to come and go. Near sounds, distant sounds, continuous sounds, occasional sounds. Simply noticing for the next fifteen to twenty seconds.

Step 5: Gently bring your attention to the natural movement of your breath. You are not changing it — just observing.

- Is the breath long or short?
- Deep or shallow?
- Where do you feel it most — at the nostrils, in the chest, or in the abdomen?
- Notice how the body slightly expands as you breathe in and softens as you breathe out.

Step 6: If the mind wanders — and it will — that is completely natural. Thoughts, memories, curiosity, planning — let them come and go. There is nothing to push away and nothing to hold on to. Each time you notice the mind has moved, gently return to the breath. We stay here for about a minute.

Step 7: Now, slowly release the focus on the breath and open your awareness to your surroundings again.

- What sounds are present now?
- What do you see?
- How does your body feel in this moment?
- Take a small pause.

Step 8: From this settled space — body, breath, and awareness — I invite you to read the lines that follow. Read them slowly. Word by word. If you wish, you may read them aloud. Let the words meet you:

Have you seen the sea?
Have you never seen it? I haven't either—
yet I have heard
that far away, to the rim of the horizon, its blue,
unbroken mass of waters surge in wave after
wave.
My heart too is the sea's deep blue,
its sorrow—have you not seen it?

For Step 8, during daily practice, you may read anything of your choice. Try to read 10-15 minutes.

Step 9: Now we begin the noticing. Start with the body.

- What is happening in the body right now?
- Any sensation, warmth, tightness, lightness, tingling?
- Take a few seconds to stay with this.

Step 10: Gently shift to the emotional field.

- What emotions are present in this moment — however subtle?
- There is no need to name them perfectly. Just sensing is enough.
- Pause here for a few seconds.

Step 11: And finally, notice the thoughts that are appearing.

- Images, associations, memories, interpretations — simply watch them arise and pass.
- Nothing to analyse, nothing to correct. Just noticing.

Step 12: Remain here for a brief moment — aware of body, emotions, and thoughts together — and of yourself as the one who is noticing.

Step 13: And now, a small twist in our journey. Rather, it is an invitation to you to take three more steps.

The first one is to *step away* for fifteen minutes. Carry this awareness with you as you walk, as you drink a cup of tea, as you look at the sky, or simply sit quietly. No phone if possible. Let this not be a break from the practice, but the practice moving with you into ordinary life. And on your way back, please carry a notebook and a pen.

Step 14: Once you are back, open your notebook and take a pen. We will do a short writing practice. Here are the ground-rules:

- Set a timer for ten minutes.
- Once you begin writing, keep your hand moving.
- Do not stop.
- Do not edit.

- Do not cross out.
- Do not reread.
- Lose control.
- If you don't know what to write, write: "I don't know what to write" — and continue until the next line comes.
- Stay specific. Use real, sensory details.
- This is practice, not performance. No one needs to see it.

Step 15: Begin with this simple prompt:

"Where I am, right now..."

Write continuously for the full ten minutes. Let the breath be natural, the body relaxed, and the words come as they are.

When the timer ends, stop gently. Take one deep breath. Close the notebook without reading. Show up. Pay attention. Keep the hand moving. The rest will follow.

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