



THE READY LIST

Skills For Life

Simple Summary

The Ready List is comprised of four very simple instructions that you consciously give to yourself:

- Stop - Relax the mind
- See - Relax the eyes
- Breathe - Relax the breathing
- Soft & Tall - Relax into being human

The list can be used in any situation and is probably most useful when it is used in activity and when used to ease your passage through intense emotions.

The list can also be formulated as 3 questions - [*see below**](#)

Going Deeper

Now it is time to learn The Ready List. It is simple, but it is very important that you understand what we mean when we tell ourselves "Stop, see, breathe, soft & tall." For now, we want to keep things very practical. The information below should be enough for you to be able to try out The Ready List for yourself whenever you wish.

When going about your daily life you will probably find that simply thinking the words of The Ready List is very effective. It is probably a preferable way of using the list when you are in the presence of others. Feel free to experiment though and maybe see if thinking or speaking affects you differently.

STOP

Relax the mind

This is the first instruction and the most important. It enables us to find a small, relatively quiet internal space, in which we can then decide to use the rest of The Ready List. As an experiment try just this for a few times: first notice how you are feeling.

- What emotions are you present to?
- What is your mind doing right now? Is it racing for example?

Now simply command yourself to "Stop!". Be sure to think it (or say it if you prefer) with conviction. You might just find that things do actually stop - although possibly not for long. Giving yourself this micro-space can be a relief, but it is so much more effective when you then take advantage of this tiny pause in the usual flow.

Once you feel ready to move forward, think "Stop" and then think "See", and follow the next procedure.

SEE

Relax the eyes

Am I seeing? When we are feeling under pressure, unsafe, or even simply concentrating, we often find ourselves staring. The eyes become fixed, our pupils dilate, and we can lose some of our peripheral vision. Notice if this is true for you. It is possible to break into this pattern of staring by consciously choosing to look at something - ideally something in the distance or across the room.

To practice this right now:

- Think "Stop"
- Raise your eyes up from this page and look at something very specific at some distance away from you.
- As you do this think "See" and take an interest in whatever it is that you are seeing. Notice the shape, the colour, where it is located relative to what is around it, in fact look at it as if it is something that you have never seen before.

- Imagine, now that your vision widens and expands. You are still seeing the object of your attention, but your vision widens in all directions, like concentric circles moving outwards when a stone is dropped into still water.
- Imagine that your eyes relax. Allow the view before you to flow into your eyes.

Pause for a moment and simply take a note of how you are feeling. Maybe try the same activity a few times, really noticing how it feels while you are doing it.

- What is happening with your eyes?
- Are you present to any emotions?

This exercise can also be practised in the dark or with your eyes closed. Simply use your imagination and visualise anything that makes you feel peaceful. I usually “see” a pinecone on a particular tree that I love for example.

Once you have tried this a few times, and once you are ready to do so, move onto the next instruction and add that experience to your list.

BREATHE

Relax the breathing

Am I breathing? Another thing that we commonly do when concentrating, feeling unsafe, or feeling under pressure, is to hold the breath. Perhaps you have caught yourself doing this at times?

Before you add "Breathe" into The Ready List maybe practice it on its own a few times first. Breathing is a function of the downstairs brain, but it is also a function that we can consciously control with the upstairs brain.

We suggest you practice consciously taking a deep breath in this way:

- First allow your mouth to GENTLY open
- SLOWLY breathe OUT through your mouth. DO NOT BLOW THE AIR OUT as if you are blowing down a straw or whistling, instead keep the jaw and lips relaxed. Breathing out first before you consciously take a deep breath in will help ensure that the lungs are as empty as possible. Many people try to breathe in when the lungs are already partially full, and this can create a feeling of breathlessness.
- At the end of the out-breath PAUSE until your body signals that it needs to breathe in again. This can be a very short interval of time or even a surprisingly long one. Observe it with interest. Your body knows when it needs to breathe in, just let it get on with it.
- ALLOW the breath to come in through the NOSE briskly but without any sort of "sniffing" sound, until your lungs feel full of air. If you can hear the air coming in it might mean that you are trying to "sniff" the air in. In which case you are tightening, and thus narrowing, the muscles around your nasal passageways. Just relax and let the breath do its thing at this point.
- PAUSE BRIEFLY - just for a second.
- Breathe out again through your mouth VERY SLOWLY. How slowly can you breathe out? Remember not to blow the air out. Let it leave your lungs GENTLY & SLOWLY.

Once you have tried this a few times, and once you are ready to do so, move onto the final instruction and complete your list.

SOFT & TALL

Relax into being human

Am I in balance? With this instruction you are going to give your body the opportunity to balance itself. We hope that you will eventually have the experience of working with a teacher who can use a very gentle and guiding touch to help you to reliably experience soft and tall. However, for now, you will certainly be able to create your own sort of experience by following these instructions.

Allowing your body to balance itself is the crucial step here. Mostly when learning something new we engage ourselves with thoughts and actions to actively make something happen. This usually results in some sort of motor activity in the body, some sort of doing *more*. Here, however we are asking you to try doing *less* and to see how that works out for you. It can be a very interesting and - sometimes - challenging adventure!

We suggest that perhaps you take a moment to contemplate what we have just suggested: that you *allow* the body to come into balance rather than *try* to make something happen.

Now let's experiment:

GETTING READY

- Sit in a hard chair with a flat seat or stand up.
- Whether you sit or stand make sure that you have both feet flat on the floor roughly hip width apart.
- If **STANDING** tune into the sense of your feet connecting with the ground - ideally remove your shoes for a clearer experience of this. Notice where the weight of your body is on your feet. Try moving your pelvis backwards a little and see if that alters the balance of weight. Adjust your pelvis backwards or forwards until you can feel weight on your feet in the area where the heel ends, and the arch of the foot begins. Where do you feel you are in space? Quite possibly you now feel that you are leaning forwards - maybe not, everyone is different. If you can, look in a full-length mirror or get someone to observe you and compare how you feel with what you can see.
- If **SITTING**, as well as being aware of your feet, flat on the ground, bring your awareness also to your sitting bones. This is the area at the base of the pelvis that you can usually feel connecting with a seat - assuming the seat is firm and not sloped. If the seat is sloped the pelvis will roll down the slope and put a strain on your lower back. There are two videos on the topic of furniture design and how it affects our well-being. Link to the [short video](#). Link to the more [comprehensive video](#)

THINKING SOFT & TALL

- Think the words "Soft and Tall".
- Imagine that your shoulders are melting and drooping - perhaps like warm, runny custard.
- What are you present to in your body when you think this?
- Check to see that only your shoulders are melting downwards.
- Maybe allow a deep breath to happen at this point, without engaging your shoulders in the breathing process. Let them just hang there if you can.
- Imagine a soft and gentle hand spread wide across your upper chest, allowing it to find space.
- Imagine a hand gently hovering just above the very top of your head
- Think of your head floating gently upwards towards this hovering hand, like a floaty balloon.
- Come back to the awareness of your sitting bones. Imagine that they melt into the seat that supports them.
- What are you present to in your body when you think this?
- If you are experiencing any tightness in your muscles, any sense of straining or pushing, just relax. Renew the thoughts of your shoulders melting and your head floating upwards.
- Please don't try to make something happen here. Even just having the thoughts "Soft and Tall" will have some small effect.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Once you feel ready try putting the whole list together, letting each instruction run into the next instruction.

A tip:

When you allow the breath to come in with the instruction "breathe", time it so that as you breathe out, you are thinking "Soft and Tall". This might help you to release into being soft and tall. Try it and see if it helps.

For the purposes of the above experiment, you were advised to sit or stand. However, The Ready List is meant to be used in activity. Once you are familiar with all the stages, then it will be time to apply the list freely in your daily life.

* The Ready List 3 Questions

If you prefer The Ready List can also be three very simple questions that you ask yourself:

- Stop - Relax the mind
- Am I Seeing? - Relax the eyes
- Am I Breathing? - Relax the breathing
- Am I Balancing? - Relax into being human



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